# THE ORDEAL OF MARK TWAIN

VAN WYCK BROOKS

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# THE ORDEAL OF MARK TWAIN

BY

VAN WYCK BROOKS

AUTHOR OF "LETTERS AND LEADERSHIP," ETC.

*"Think it over, dear B—! A man's gifts are not a property: they are a duty."*

—IBSEN'S *Letters*

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TO
E. S. B.

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# THE ORDEAL OF MARK TWAIN

# THE ORDEAL OF MARK TWAIN

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTORY: MARK TWAIN'S DESPAIR

"What a man sees in the human race is merely himself in the deep and honest privacy of his own heart. Byron despised the race because he despised himself. I feel as Byron did, and for the same reason."—*Marginal note in one of Mark Twain's books.*

TO those who are interested in American life and letters there has been no question of greater significance, during the last few years, than the pessimism of Mark Twain. During the last few years, I say, for his own friends and contemporaries were rather inclined to make light of his oft-expressed belief that man is the meanest of the animals and life a tragic mistake.

For some time before his death Mark Twain had appeared before the public in the rôle less of a laughing philosopher than of a somewhat gloomy prophet of modern civilization. But he was old and he had suffered many misfortunes and the progress of society is not a matter for any one to be very jubilant about: to be gloomy about the world is a sort of prerogative of those who have lived long and thought much. The public that had grown old with him could hardly, therefore, accept at its face value a point of view that seemed to be contradicted by so many of the facts of Mark Twain's life and character. Mr. Howells, who knew him inti-

mately for forty years, spoke only with an affectionate derision of his "pose" regarding "the damned human race," and we know the opinion of his loyal biographer, Mr. Paine, that he was "not a pessimist in his heart, but only by premeditation." These views were apparently borne out by his own testimony. "My temperament," he wrote, shortly after the death of his daughter Jean, "has never allowed my spirits to remain depressed long at a time." That he remained active and buoyant to the end was, in fact, for his associates, sufficient evidence that his philosophical despair was only an anomaly, which had no organic part in the structure of his life.

Was it not natural that they should feel thus about him, those contemporaries of his, so few of whom had seen his later writings and all the tell-tale private memoranda which Mr. Paine has lately given to the world? What a charmed life was Mark Twain's, after all! To be able to hold an immense nation in the hollow of one's hand, to be able to pour out into millions of sympathetic ears, with calm confidence, as into the ears of a faithful friend, all the private griefs and intimate humors of a lifetime, to be called "the King" by those one loves, to be so much more than a king in reality that every attack of gout one has is "good for a column" in the newspapers and every phrase one utters girdles the world in twenty minutes, to be addressed as "the Messiah of a genuine gladness and joy to the millions of three continents"—what more could Tom Sawyer, at least, have wished than that? And Mark Twain's fame was not merely one of sentiment. If the public heart was moved by everything that concerned him,—an illness in his household, a new campaign against political corruption, a change of residence, and he was deluged with letters extolling him, whatever he did or said, if he won the world's pity when he got into debt and the world's praise when he got out of it, he was no sort of nine days' wonder; his country had made him its "gen-

eral spokesman," he was quite within his rights in appointing himself, as he said, "ambassador-at-large of the United States of America." Since the day, half a century back, when all official Washington, from the Cabinet down, had laughed over "The Innocents Abroad" and offered him his choice of a dozen public offices to the day when the newspapers were freely proposing that he ought to have the thanks of the nation and even suggested his name for the Presidency, when, in his person, the Speaker of the House, for the first time in American history, gave up his private chamber to a lobbyist, and private cars were placed at his disposal whenever he took a journey, and his baggage went round the world with consular dispensations, and his opinion was asked on every subject by everybody, he had been, indeed, a sort of incarnation of the character and quality of modern America. "Everywhere he moved," says Mr. Paine, "a world revolved about him." In London, in Vienna, his apartments were a court, and traffic rules were modified to let him pass in the street. A charmed life, surely, when we consider, in addition to this public acclaim, the tidal waves of wealth that flowed in upon him again and again, the intense happiness of his family relations, and the splendid recognition of those fellow-members of his craft whose word to him was final—Kipling, who "loved to think of the great and godlike Clemens," and Brander Matthews, who freely compared him with the greatest writers of history, and Bernard Shaw, who announced that America had produced just two geniuses, Edgar Allan Poe and Mark Twain. Finally, there was Mr. Howells, "the recognized critical Court of Last Resort in this country," as he called him. Did not Mr. Howells, like posterity itself, whisper in his ear: "Your foundations are struck so deep that you will catch the sunshine of immortal years, and bask in the same light as Cervantes and Shakespeare"?

The spectators of this drama could hardly have been

expected to take the pessimism of Mark Twain seriously, and all the more because he totally refuted the old and popular notion that humorists are always melancholy. I have already quoted the remark he made about his temperament in one of the darkest moments of his life, four months before his own death. It is borne out by all the evidence of all his years. He was certainly not one of those radiant, sunny, sky-blue natures, those June-like natures that sing out their full joy, the day long, under a cloudless heaven. Far from that! He was an August nature, given to sudden storms and thunder; his atmosphere was charged with electricity. But the storm-clouds passed as swiftly as they gathered, and the warm, bright, mellow mood invariably returned. "What a child he was," says Mr. Paine, "always, to the very end!" He was indeed a child in the buoyancy of his spirits. "People who always feel jolly, no matter where they are or what happens to them, who have the organ of Hope preposterously developed, who are endowed with an uncongealable sanguine temperament!" he writes, referring to himself, in 1861. "If there is," he adds, thirteen years later, "one individual creature on all this footstool who is more thoroughly and uniformly and unceasingly *happy* than I am I defy the world to produce him and *prove* him." And it seems always to have been so. Whether he is "revelling" in his triumphs on the platform or indulging his "rainbow-hued impulses" on paper, we see him again and again, as Mr. Paine saw him in Washington in 1906 when he was expounding the gospel of copyright to the members of Congress assembled, "happy and wonderfully excited." Can it surprise us then to find him, in his seventy-fifth year, adding to the note about his daughter's death: "Shall I ever be cheerful again, happy again? Yes. And soon. For I know my temperament"?

And his physical health was just what one might

expect from this, from his immense vitality. He was subject to bronchial colds and he had intermittent attacks of rheumatism in later years: otherwise, his health appears to have been as perfect as his energy was inexhaustible. "I have been sick a-bed several days, for the first time in 21 years," he writes in 1875; from all one gathers he might have made the same statement twenty-one, thirty-one years later. Read his letters, at fifty, at sixty, at seventy—during that extraordinary period, well within the memory of people who are still young, when he had solved his financial difficulties by going into bankruptcy and went about, as Mr. Paine says, "like a débutante in her first season,"—the days when people called him "the Belle of New York": "By half past 4," he writes to his wife, "I had danced all those people down—and yet was not tired, merely breathless. I was in bed at 5 and asleep in ten minutes. Up at 9 and presently at work on this letter to you." And again, the next year, his sixtieth year, when he had been playing billiards with H. H. Rogers, until Rogers looked at him helplessly and asked, "Don't you ever get tired?": "I was able to say that I had forgotten what that feeling was like. Don't you remember how almost impossible it was for me to tire myself at the villa? Well, it is just so in New York. I go to bed unfatigued at 3, I get up fresh and fine six hours later. I believe I have taken only one daylight nap since I have been here." Finally, let us take the testimony of Mr. Paine, who was with him day in, day out, during the last five years of his life when, even at seventy-four, he was still playing billiards "9 hours a day and 10 or 12 on Sunday": "In no other human being have I ever seen such physical endurance. I was comparatively a young man, and by no means an invalid; but many a time, far in the night, when I was ready to drop with exhaustion, he was still as fresh and buoyant and eager for the game as at the moment

of beginning. He smoked and smoked continually, and followed the endless track around the billiard-table with the light step of youth. At 3 or 4 o'clock in the morning he would urge just one more game, and would taunt me for my weariness. I can truthfully testify that never until the last year of his life did he willingly lay down the billiard-cue, or show the least suggestion of fatigue."

Now this was the Mark Twain his contemporaries, his intimates, had ever in their eyes,—this darling of all the gods. No wonder they were inclined to take his view of "the damned human race" as rather a whimsical pose; they would undoubtedly have continued to take it so even if they had known, generally known, that he had a way of referring in private to "God's most elegant invention" as not only "damned" but also "mangy." He was irritable, but literary men are always supposed to be that; he was old, and old people are often afflicted with doubts about the progress and welfare of mankind; he had a warm and tender heart, an abounding scorn of humbug: one did not have to go beyond these facts to explain his contempt for "the Blessings-of-Civilization Trust," with its stock-in-trade, "Glass Beads and Theology," and "Maxim Guns and Hymn-Books," and "Trade Gin and Torches of Progress and Enlightenment." All his closest friends were accustomed to little notes like this: "I have been reading the morning paper. I do it every morning, well knowing that I shall find in it the usual depravities and basenesses and hypocricies and cruelties that make up civilization and cause me to put in the rest of the day pleading for the damnation of the human race." Might not any sensitive man, young or old, have written that?

Even now, with all the perspective of Mark Twain's writings which only a succeeding generation can really have, it might be possible to explain in this objective way the steady progress toward a pessimistic cynicism

which Mr. Paine, at least, has noted in his work. The change in tone between the poetry of the first half of "Life on the Mississippi" and the dull notation of the latter half, between the exuberance of "A Tramp Abroad" and the drab and weary journalism of "Following the Equator," with those corroding aphorisms of "Pudd'nhead Wilson's New Calendar," that constant running refrain of weariness, exasperation and misery, along the tops of the chapters, as if he wanted to get even with the reader for taking his text at its face value —all this might be attributed, as Mr. Paine attributes it, to the burdens of debt and family sorrow. If he was always manifesting, in word and deed, his deep belief that life is inevitably a process of deterioration,—well, did not James Whitcomb Riley do the same thing? Was it not, is it not, a popular American dogma that "the baddest children are better than the goodest men"? A race of people who feel this way could not have thought there was anything amiss with a humorist who wrote maxims like these:

> If you pick up a starving dog and make him prosperous, he will not bite you. This is the principal difference between a dog and a man.
>
> It takes your enemy and your friend, working together, to hurt you to the heart: the one to slander you and the other to get the news to you.

They could hardly have been surprised at the bitter, yes, even the vindictive, mockery of "The Man That Corrupted Hadleyburg," at Mark Twain's definition of man as a "mere coffee-mill" which is permitted neither "to supply the coffee nor turn the crank," at his recurring "plan" to exterminate the human race by withdrawing the oxygen from the air for a period of two minutes.

Has not the American public, with its invincible habit of "turning hell's back-yard into a playground," gone so far even as to discount "The Mysterious Stranger,"

that fearful picture of life as a rigmarole of cruel nonsense, a nightmare of Satanic unrealities, with its frank assertion that slavery, hypocrisy and cowardice are the eternal destiny of man? Professor Stuart P. Sherman, who likes to defend the views of thirty years ago and sometimes seems to forget that all traditions are not of equal validity, says of this book that it "lets one into a temperament and character of more gravity, complexity and interest than the surfaces indicated." But having made this discovery, for he is openly surprised, Professor Sherman merely reveals in his new and unexpected Mark Twain the Mark Twain most people had known before: "What Mark Twain hated was the brutal power resident in monarchies, aristocracies, tribal religions and—minorities bent on mischief, and making a bludgeon of the malleable many." And, after all, he says, "the wicked world visited by the mysterious stranger is sixteenth century Austria—not these States." But is it? Isn't the village of Eselburg in reality Hannibal, Missouri, all over again, and are not the boys through whose eyes the story is told simply reincarnations of Huck Finn and Tom Sawyer, those characters which, as we know from a hundred evidences, haunted Mark Twain's mind all his life long? They are, at any rate, Mark Twain's boys, and whoever compares their moral attitude with that of the boys of Mark Twain's prime will see how deeply the iron had entered into his soul. "We boys wanted to warn them"—Marget and Ursula, against the danger that was gathering about them—"but we backed down when it came to the pinch, being afraid. We found that we were not manly enough nor brave enough to do a generous action when there was a chance that it could get us into trouble." What, is this Mark Twain speaking, the creator of Huck and Tom, who gladly broke every law of the tribe to protect and rescue Nigger Jim? Mark Twain's boys "not manly enough nor brave enough" to do a generous action when

there was a chance that it could get them into trouble? Can we, in the light of this, continue to say that Mark Twain's pessimism was due to anything so external as the hatred of tyranny, and a sixteenth century Austrian tyranny at that? Is it not perfectly plain that that deep contempt for man, the "coffee-mill," a contempt that has spread now even to the boy-nature of which Mark Twain had been the lifelong hierophant, must have had some far more personal root, must have sprung from some far more intimate chagrin? One goes back to the long series of "Pudd'nhead" maxims, not the bitter ones now, but those desperate notes that seem to bear no relation to the life even of a sardonic humorist:

> Pity is for the living, envy is for the dead.
>
> All say, "How hard it is that we have to die"—a strange complaint to come from the mouths of people who have had to live.
>
> Each person is born to one possession which outvalues all his others—his last breath.

And that paragraph about the death of his daughter, so utterly inconsistent with the temperament he ascribes to himself: "My life is a bitterness, but I am content; for she has been enriched with the most precious of all gifts—the gift that makes all other gifts mean and poor—death. I have never wanted any released friend of mine restored to life since I reached manhood. I felt in this way when Susy passed away; and later my wife, and later Mr. Rogers." Two or three constructions, to one who knows Mark Twain, might be put upon that: but at least one of them is that, not to the writer's apprehension, but in the writer's experience, life has been in some special way a vain affliction.

Can we, then, accept any of the usual explanations of Mark Twain's pessimism? Can we attribute it, with Mr. Paine, to the burdens of debt under which he labored now and again, to the recurring illnesses, the death of

those he loved? No, for these things would have modified his temperament, not his point of view; they would have saddened him, checked his vitality, given birth perhaps to a certain habit of brooding, and this they did not do. We have, in addition to his own testimony, the word of Mr. Paine: "More than any one I ever knew, he lived in the present." Of the misfortunes of life he had neither more nor less than other men, and they affected him neither more nor less. To say anything else would be to contradict the whole record of his personality.

No, it was some deep malady of the soul that afflicted Mark Twain, a malady common to many Americans, perhaps, if we are to judge from that excessive interest in therapeutics which he shared with so many millions of his fellow-countrymen. That is an aspect of Mark Twain's later history which has received too little attention. "Whether it was copyright legislation, the latest invention, or a new empiric practice," says Mr. Paine—to approach this subject on its broadest side—"he rarely failed to have a burning interest in some anodyne that would provide physical or mental easement for his species." And here again the general leads to the particular. "He had," says Mr. Howells, "a tender heart for the whole generation of empirics, as well as the newer sorts of scienticians." Mr. Howells tells how, on the advice of some sage, he and all his family gave up their spectacles for a time and came near losing their eyesight, thanks to the miracle that had been worked in their behalf. But that was the least of his divagations. There was that momentary rage for the art of "predicating correlation" at Professor Loisette's School of Memory. There was Dr. Kellgren's osteopathic method that possessed his mind during the year 1900; he wrote long articles about it, bombarding his friends with letters of appreciation and recommendation of the new cure-all: "indeed," says Mr. Paine, "he gave most of

his thought to it." There was Plasmon, that "panacea for all human ills which osteopathy could not reach." There was Christian Science to which, in spite of his attacks on Mrs. Eddy and the somewhat equivocal book he wrote on the subject, he was, as Mr. Paine says, and as he frequently averred himself, one of the "earliest converts," who "never lost faith in its power." And lastly, there was the "eclectic therapeutic doctrine" which he himself put together piecemeal from all the others, to the final riddance of *materia medica*.

We have seen what Mark Twain's apparent health was. Can we say that this therapeutic obsession was due to the illnesses of his family, which were, indeed, unending? No doubt those illnesses provided a constant stimulus to the obsession—the "eclectic therapeutic doctrine," for instance, did, quite definitely, rise up out of the midst of them. But it is plain that there had to be an element of "soul-cure" in these various healings for Mark Twain to be interested in them, that what interested him in them *was* the "soul-cure," the "mind-cure." Can he say too much in praise of Christian Science for its "healing of the spirit," its gift of "buoyant spirits, comfort of mind and freedom from care"? In fact, unless I am mistaken, his interest in mental healing began at a time when he and his family alike were free from illness. It is in 1886, when Mark Twain was at the very summit of his fame, when he was the most successful publisher in the world, when he was at work on his most ambitious book, when he was "frightened," as he said, at the proportions of his prosperity, when his household was aglow with happiness and well-being, that his daughter Susy notes in her diary: "Papa has been very much interested of late in the 'mind-cure' theory." It might be added that he was about at the age when, according to his famous aphorism, a man who does not become a pessimist knows too little about life.

In fact, the more one scans the later pages of Mark Twain's history the more one is forced to the conclusion that there was something gravely amiss with his inner life. There was that frequently noted fear of solitude, that dread of being alone with himself which made him, for example, beg for just one more game of billiards at 4 o'clock in the morning. There were those "daily self-chidings" that led him to slay his own conscience in one of the most ferocious of his humorous tales. That conscience of his—what was it? Why do so many of his jokes turn upon an affectation, let us say, of moral cowardice in himself? How does it happen that when he reads "Romola" the only thing that "hits" him "with force" is Tito's compromise with his conscience? Why those continual fits of remorse, those fantastic self-accusations in which he charged himself, we are told, with having filled Mrs. Clemens's life with privations, in which he made himself responsible first for the death of his younger brother and later for that of his daughter Susy, writing to his wife, according to Mr. Paine, that he was "wholly and solely responsible for the tragedy, detailing step by step with fearful reality his mistakes and weaknesses which had led to their downfall, the separation from Susy, and this final, incredible disaster"? Was there any reason why, humorously or otherwise, he should have spoken of himself as a liar, why he should have said, in reply to his own idea of writing a book about Tom Sawyer's after-life: "If I went on now and took him into manhood, he would just lie, like all the one-horse men in literature, and the reader would conceive a hearty contempt for him"? That morbid feeling of having lived in sin, which made him come to think of literature as primarily, perhaps, the confession of sins—was there anything in the moral point of view of his generation to justify it, in this greatly-loved writer, this honorable man of business, this zealous reformer, this loyal friend? "Be weak, be

water, be characterless, be cheaply persuadable'' was, he said, the first command the Deity ever issued to a human being on this planet, the only command Adam would never be able to disobey. And he noted on the margin of one of his books: ''What a man sees in the human race is merely himself in the deep and honest privacy of his own heart. Byron despised the race because he despised himself. I feel as Byron did and for the same reason.''

A strange enigma! ''You observe,'' wrote Mark Twain once, almost at the beginning of his career, ''that under a cheerful exterior I have got a spirit that is angry with me and gives me freely its contempt.'' That spirit remained with him, grew in him, to the last. The restless movement of his life, those continual journeys to Bermuda, where ''the deep peace and quiet of the country sink into one's body and bones and give his conscience a rest,'' that consuming desire to write an autobiography ''as caustic, fiendish and devilish as possible,'' which would ''make people's hair curl'' and get ''his heirs and assigns burnt alive'' if they ventured to print it within a hundred years, the immense relief of his seventieth birthday, to him ''the scriptural statute of limitations—you have served your term, well or less well, and you are mustered out''—how are we to read the signs of all this hidden tragedy? For Mark Twain was right—things do not happen by chance, and the psychological determinism of the present day bears out in certain respects that other sort of determinism in which he so almost fanatically believed. There is no figure for the human being like the ship, he sometimes said. Well, was he not, in the eyes of his contemporaries, just as he proudly, gratefully suggested, in the glory of that last English welcome, the *Begum* of Bengal, stateliest of Indiamen, plowing the great seas under a cloud of canvas? Can we call it merely an irony of circumstance that in his own eyes he was a bit of storm-beaten

human drift, a derelict, washing about on a forlorn sea?

No, there was a reason for Mark Twain's pessimism, a reason for that chagrin, that fear of solitude, that tortured conscience, those fantastic self-accusations, that indubitable self-contempt. It is an established fact, if I am not mistaken, that these morbid feelings of sin, which have no evident cause, are the result of having transgressed some inalienable life-demand peculiar to one's nature. It is as old as Milton that there are talents which are "death to hide," and I suggest that Mark Twain's "talent" was just so hidden. That bitterness of his was the effect of a certain miscarriage in his creative life, a balked personality, an arrested development of which he was himself almost wholly unaware, but which for him destroyed the meaning of life. The spirit of the artist in him, like the genie at last released from the bottle, overspread in a gloomy vapor the mind it had never quite been able to possess.

Does this seem too rash a hypothesis? It is, I know, the general impression that Mark Twain quite fully effectuated himself as a writer. Mr. Howells called him the "Lincoln of our literature," Professor William Lyon Phelps describes him as one of the supreme novelists of the world, Professor Brander Matthews compares him with Cervantes, and Bernard Shaw said to him once: "I am persuaded that the future historian of America will find your works as indispensable to him as a French historian finds the political tracts of Voltaire." These were views current in Mark Twain's lifetime, and similar views are common enough to-day. "Mark Twain," says Professor Archibald Henderson, "enjoys the unique distinction of exhibiting a progressive development, a deepening and broadening of forces, a ripening of intellectual and spiritual powers from the beginning to the end." To Mr. John Macy, author of what is, on the whole, the most discerning book that has been written on our literature, he is "a powerful, original thinker." And

finally, Mr. H. L. Mencken says: "Mark Twain, without question, was a great artist. There was in him something of that prodigality of imagination, that aloof engrossment in the human comedy, that penetrating cynicism, which one associates with the great artists of the Renaissance." An imposing array of affirmations, surely! And yet, unless I am mistaken, these last few years, during which he has become in a way so much more interesting, have witnessed a singular change in Mark Twain's reputation. Vividly present he is in the public mind as a great historic figure, as a sort of archtype of the national character during a long epoch. Will he not continue so to be for many generations to come? Undoubtedly. By whom, however, with the exception of two or three of his books, is he read? Mr. Paine, I know, says that "The Innocents Abroad" sells to this day in America in larger quantity than any other book of travel. But a number of explanations might be given for this, as for any other mob phenomenon, none of which has anything to do with literary fame in the proper sense. A great writer of the past is known by the delight and stimulus which he gives to mature spirits in the present, and time, it seems to me, tends to bear out the assertion of Henry James that Mark Twain's appeal is an appeal to rudimentary minds. "Huckleberry Finn," "Tom Sawyer," a story or two like "The Man That Corrupted Hadleyburg," a sketch or two like "Traveling with a Reformer" and a few chapters of "Life on the Mississippi,"—these, in any case, can already be said to have "survived" all his other work. And are these writings, however beautiful and important, the final expressions of a supreme artistic genius, one of the great novelists of the world, a second Cervantes? Arnold Bennett, I think, forecast the view that prevails to-day when he called their author the "divine amateur" and said of "Huckleberry Finn" and "Tom Sawyer" that while they are "episodically magnificent,

as complete works of art they are of quite inferior quality."

So much for what Mark Twain actually accomplished. But if he had not been potentially a great man could he have so impressed, so dazzled almost every one who came into direct, personal contact with him? When his contemporaries compared him with Swift, Voltaire, Cervantes, they were certainly mistaken; but would they have made that mistake if they had not recognized in him, if not a creative capacity, at least a creative force, of the highest rank? Mark Twain's unbounded energy, his prodigal fertility, his large utterance, that "great, burly fancy" of his, as Mr. Howells calls it, his powers of feeling, the unique magnetism of his personality were the signs of an endowment, one cannot help thinking, more extraordinary than that of any other American writer. He seemed predestined to be one of those major spirits, like Carlyle, like Ibsen perhaps, or perhaps like Pushkin, who are as if intended by nature to preside over the genius of nations and give birth to the leading impulses of entire epochs. "I thought," said one of his associates in earlier years, "that the noble costume of the Albanian would have well become him. Or he might have been a Goth, and worn the horned bull-pate helmet of Alaric's warriors, or stood at the prow of one of the swift craft of the vikings." And on the other hand, hear what Mr. Howells says: "Among the half-dozen, or half-hundred, personalities that each of us becomes, I should say that Clemens's central and final personality was something exquisite." That combination of barbaric force and intense sweetness, which so many others noted in him—is there not about it something portentous, something that suggests the true lord of life? Wherever he walked among men he trailed with him the psychic atmosphere of a planet as it were all his own. Gigantic, titanic were the words that came to people's lips when they tried to convey their impres-

sion of him, and when he died it seemed for the moment as if one of the fixed stars had fallen in space.

This was the force, this the energy which, through Mark Twain's pen, found such inadequate expression. He was, as Arnold Bennett says, a "divine amateur"; his appeal is, on the whole, what Henry James called it, an appeal to rudimentary minds. But is not that simply another way of saying, in the latter case, that his was a mind that had not developed, and in the former, that his was a splendid genius which had never found itself?

It is the conclusion borne out by Mark Twain's own self-estimate. His judgments were, as Mr. Paine says, "always unsafe": strictly speaking, he never knew what to think of himself, he was in two minds all the time. This, in itself a sign of immaturity, serves to warn us against his formal opinions. When, therefore, one appeals for evidence to Mark Twain's estimate of himself it is no conscious judgment of his career one has in mind but a far more trustworthy judgment, the judgment of his unconscious self. This he revealed unawares in all sorts of ways.

There were times when he seemed to share the complacent confidence of so many others in his immortal fame. "I told Howells," he writes, in his large, loose, easy way, "that this autobiography of mine would live a couple of thousand years, without any effort, and would then take a fresh start and live the rest of the time." And Mr. Paine says that as early as October, 1900, he had proposed to Messrs. Harper and Brothers a contract for publishing his personal memoirs at the expiration of one hundred years, letters covering the details of which were exchanged with his financial adviser, Mr. Rogers. A man who could have proposed this must have felt, at moments anyway, pretty secure of posterity, pretty confident of his own greatness. But it was only at moments. Mark Twain was a megalomaniac; only a megalomaniac could have advertised, as

he did, for post-mortem obituaries of himself. But does that sort of megalomania express a genuine self-confidence? Does it not suggest rather a profound, uneasy desire for corroboration? Of this the famous episode of his Oxford degree is the most striking symbol. "Although I wouldn't cross an ocean again for the price of the ship that carried me, I am glad to do it," he wrote, "for an Oxford degree." Many American writers have won that honor; it is, in fact, almost a routine incident in a distinguished career. In the case of Mark Twain it became a historic event: it was for him, plainly, of an exceptional significance, and all his love for gorgeous trappings could never account for the delight he had in that doctor's gown—"I would dress that way all the time, if I dared," he told Mr. Paine—which became for him a permanent robe of ceremony. And Mark Twain at seventy-two, one of the most celebrated men in the world, could not have cared so much for it if it had been a vindication merely in the eyes of others. It must have served in some way also to vindicate him in his own eyes; he seized upon it as a sort of talisman, as a reassurance from what he considered the highest court of culture, that he really was one of the elect.

Yes, that naïve passion for the limelight, for "walking with kings" and hobnobbing with job lots of celebrities, that "revelling," as Mr. Paine calls it, "in the universal tribute"—what was its root if not a deep sense of insecurity, a desire for approval both in his own eyes and in the eyes of all the world? During those later years in New York, when he had become so much the professional celebrity, he always timed his Sunday morning walks on Fifth Avenue for about the hour when the churches were out. Mr. Paine tells how, on the first Sunday morning, he thoughtlessly suggested that they should turn away at Fifty-ninth Street in order to avoid the throng and that Clemens quietly remarked, "I like the throng." "So," says Mr. Paine, "we rested in the

Plaza Hotel until the appointed hour. . . . We left the Plaza Hotel and presently were amid the throng of outpouring congregations. Of course he was the object on which every passing eye turned, the presence to which every hat was lifted. I realized that this open and eagerly paid homage of the multitude was still dear to him, not in any small and petty way, but as the tribute of a nation." And must not the desire for approval and corroboration, the sense of insecurity, have been very deep in a quick-tempered, satirical democrat like Mark Twain, when he permitted his associates to call him, as Mr. Paine says they did, "the King"? Actual kings were with him nothing less than an obsession: kings, empresses, princes, archduchesses—what a part they play in his biography! He is always dragging them in, into his stories, into his letters, writing about his dinners with them, and his calls upon them, and how friendly they are, and what gorgeous funerals they have. And as with kings, so also with great men, or men who were considered great, or men who were merely notorious. He makes lists of those he has known, those he has spent evenings with—Mark Twain, to whom celebrity was the cheapest thing going! Is there not in all this the suggestion of an almost conscious weakness clutching at strength, the suggestion of some kind of failure that sets a premium upon almost any kind of success?

Turn from the man to the writer; we see again this same desire for approval, for corroboration. Mark Twain was supported by the sentiment of the majority, which was gospel to the old-fashioned Westerner; he had the golden opinion of Mr. Howells, in his eyes the arbiter of all the elegances; he had virtually the freedom of *The Atlantic Monthly,* and not only its freedom but a higher rate of payment than any other *Atlantic* contributor. Could any American man of letters have had more reason to think well of himself? Observe what

he thought. "I haven't as good an opinion of my work as you hold of it," he writes to Mr. Howells in 1887, "but I've always done what I could to secure and enlarge my good opinion of it. I've always said to myself, 'Everybody reads it and that's something—it surely isn't pernicious, or the most acceptable people would get pretty tired of it.' And when a critic said by implication that it wasn't high and fine, through the remark, 'High and fine literature is wine,' I retorted (confidentially to myself), 'Yes, high and fine literature is wine, and mine is only water; but everybody likes water.'" That is frank enough; he is not always so. There is a note of unconscious guile, the guile of the peasant, of the sophisticated small boy, in the letter he wrote to Andrew Lang, beseeching a fair hearing in England for the "Connecticut Yankee." He rails against "the cultivated-class standard"; he half poses as an uplifter of the masses; then, with a touch of mock-noble indignation, he confesses to being a popular entertainer, fully convinced at least that there are two kinds of literature and that an author ought to be allowed to put upon his book an explanatory line: "This is written for the Head," or "This is written for the Belly or the Members." No plea more grotesque or more pathetic was ever written by a man with a great reputation to support. It shows that Mark Twain was completely ignorant of literary values: had he not wished upon literature, as it were, a separation between the "Head" and the "Belly" which, as we shall see, had simply taken place in himself? Out of his own darkness he begs for the word of salvation from one who he thinks can bestow it.

Mark Twain, in short, knew very well—for I think these illustrations prove it—that there was something decidedly different between himself and a great writer. In that undifferentiated mob of celebrities, great, and less great, and far from great, amid which he moved for

a generation, he was a favored equal. But in the intimate presence of some isolated greatness he reverted to the primitive reverence of the candidate for the mystagogue. Was it Emerson? He ceased to be a fellow writer, he became one of the devout Yankee multitude. Was it Browning? He forgot the man he had so cordially known in the poet whom he studied for a time with the naïve self-abasement of a neophyte. Was it Mommsen? Read this humorous entry in one of his Berlin note-books: "Been taken for Mommsen twice. We have the same hair, but on examination it was found the brains were different." In fact, whenever he uses the word "literature" in connection with his own work it is with a sudden self-consciousness that lets one into the secret of his inner humility. "I am the only literary animal of my particular subspecies who has ever been given a degree by any college in any age of the world, so far as I know," he writes to the authorities of Yale in 1888. A man who freely compared himself with the melodeon, as distinguished from the opera, who, in the preface to "Those Extraordinary Twins," invited his readers, who already knew how "the born and trained novelist works," to see how the "jack-leg" does it, could never have been accused of not knowing his true rank. "You and I are but sewing-machines," he says in "What Is Man?" "We must turn out what we can; we must do our endeavor and care nothing at all when the unthinking reproach us for not turning out Gobelins."

I think we are in a position now to understand that boundless comic impudence of Mark Twain's, that comic impudence which led him to propose to Edwin Booth in 1873 a new character for "Hamlet," which led him to telegraph to W. T. Stead: "The Czar is ready to disarm. I am ready to disarm. Collect the others; it should not be much of a task now"; which led him, at the outset of his career, to propose the conundrum,

"Why am I like the Pacific Ocean?" and to answer it thus: "I don't know. I was just asking for information." Tempting Providence, was he not, this child of good fortune? Literally, yes; he was trying out the fates. If he had not had a certain sense of colossal force, it would never have occurred to him, however humorously, to place himself on an equality with Shakespeare, to compare his power with that of the Czar and his magnitude with that of the Pacific Ocean. But, on the other hand, it would never have occurred to him to make these comparisons if he had felt himself in possession, in control, of that force. Men who are not only great in energy but masters of themselves let their work speak for them; men who are not masters of themselves, whose energy, however great, is not, so to speak, at the disposal of their own spirits, are driven, as we see Mark Twain perpetually driven, to seek corroboration from without; for his inner self, at these moments, wished to be assured that he really was great and powerful like the Pacific and Shakespeare and the Czar. He resembled those young boys who have inherited great fortunes which they own but cannot command; the power is theirs and yet they are not in control of it; consequently, in order to reassure themselves, they are always "showing off." We are not mistaken, therefore, in feeling that in this comic impudence Mark Twain actually was interrogating destiny, feeling out his public, in other words, which had in its hands the disposal of that ebullient energy of his, an energy that he could not measure, could not estimate, that seemed to him simply of an indeterminable, untestable, and above all uncontrollable abundance. Did he not, in this childlike self-magnification, combined with an instinctive trust in luck that never left him, resemble the barbarian conquerors of antiquity? Not one of these, in the depth of that essential self-ignorance, that lack of inner control that makes one's sole criterion the

magnitude of one's grasp over the outer world, ever more fully felt himself the man of destiny. All his life Mark Twain was attended by what Mr. Paine calls "psychic evidences"; he never fails to note the marvelous coincidences of which he is the subject; he is always being struck by some manifestation of "mental telegraphy"—he invented the phrase; strange phenomena of nature rise up in his path. Three times, while crossing the ocean, he sees a lunar rainbow, and each time he takes it as a presage of good fortune. Not one of the barbarian conquerors of antiquity, I say, those essential opposites of the creative spirit, whose control is altogether internal, and who feels himself the master of his own fate, could have been more in character than was Mark Twain when he observed, a few months before his death: "I came in with Halley's comet in 1835. It is coming again next year, and I expect to go out with it. It will be the greatest disappointment of my life if I don't go out with Halley's comet. The Almighty has said, no doubt: 'Now here are these two unaccountable freaks, they came in together, they must go out together.' Oh! I am looking forward to that."

A comet, this time! And a few pages back we found him comparing himself with a sewing-machine. Which is he, one, or the other, or both? He seems to exhibit himself, on the one hand, as a child of nature conscious of extraordinary powers that make all the world and even the Almighty solicitous about him, and on the other, as a humble, a humiliated man, confessedly second-rate, who has lost nine of the ten talents committed to him and almost begs permission to keep the one that remains. A great genius, in short, that has never attained the inner control which makes genius great, a mind that has not found itself, a mind that does not know itself, a spirit that cloaks to the end in the fantasy of its temporal power the tragic reality of its own essential miscarriage!

We are in possession now, it seems to me, of the secret of Mark Twain's mechanistic philosophy, the philosophy of that little book which he called his "Bible," "What Is Man?" He was extremely proud of the structure of logic he had built up on the thesis that man is a machine, "moved, directed, commanded by *exterior* influences, *solely*," that he is "a chameleon, who takes the color of his place of resort," that he is "a mere coffee-mill," which is permitted neither "to supply the coffee nor turn the crank." He confesses to a sort of proprietary interest and pleasure in the validity of that notion. "Having found the Truth," he says, "preceiving that beyond question man has but one moving impulse—the contenting of his own spirit—and is merely a machine and entitled to no personal merit for what he does, it is not humanly possible for me to seek further. The rest of my days will be spent in patching and painting and puttying and calking my priceless possession and in looking the other way when an imploring argument or a damaging fact approaches." You see how it pleases him, how much it means to him, that final "Truth," how he clings to it with a sort of defiant insolence against the "imploring argument," the "damaging fact"? "Man originates nothing," he says, "not even a thought. . . . Shakespeare could not create. He was a machine, and machines do not create." Faith never gave the believer more comfort than this philosophy gave Mark Twain.

But is it possible for a creative mind to find "contentment" in denying the possibility of creation? And why should any one find pride and satisfaction in the belief that man is wholly irresponsible, in the denial of "free will"? One remembers the fable of the fox and the sour grapes, one remembers all those forlorn and tragic souls who find comfort in saying that love exists nowhere in the world because they themselves have missed it. Certainly it could not have afforded Mark

Twain any pleasure to feel that he was "entitled to no personal merit" for what he had done, for what he had achieved in life; the pleasure he felt sprang from the relief his theory afforded him, the relief of feeling that he was not responsible for what he had failed to achieve—namely, his proper development as an artist. He says aloud, "Shakespeare could not create," and his inner self adds, "How in the world, then, could I have done so?" He denies "free will" because the creative life is the very embodiment of it—the emergence, that is to say, the activity in a man of one central, dominant, integrating principle that turns the world he confronts into a mere instrument for the registration of his own preferences. There is but one interpretation, consequently, which we can put upon Mark Twain's delight in the conception of man as an irresponsible machine: it brought him comfort to feel that if he was, as he said, a "sewing-machine," it was the doing of destiny, and that nothing he could have done himself would have enabled him to "turn out Gobelins."

From his philosophy alone, therefore, we can see that Mark Twain was a frustrated spirit, a victim of arrested development, and beyond this fact, as we know from innumerable instances the psychologists have placed before us, we need not look for an explanation of the chagrin of his old age. He had been balked, he had been divided, he had even been turned, as we shall see, against himself; the poet, the artist in him, consequently, had withered into the cynic and the whole man had become a spiritual valetudinarian.

But this is a long story: to trace it we shall have to glance not only at Mark Twain's life and work, but also at the epoch and the society in which he lived.

## CHAPTER II

### THE CANDIDATE FOR LIFE

"One is inclined to say that the source of sensibility is dried up in this people. They are just, they are reasonable, but they are essentially not happy."

STENDHAL: *On Love in the United States.*

IN 1882, Mark Twain, who had been living for so many years in the East, revisited the great river of his childhood and youth in order to gather material for his book, "Life on the Mississippi." It was, naturally, a profound and touching experience, and years later he told Mr. Paine what his thoughts and memories had been. He had intended to travel under an assumed name, to pass unknown among those familiar scenes, but the pilot of the steamer *Gold Dust* recognized him. Mark Twain haunted the pilot-house and even, as in days of old, took his turn at the wheel. "We got to be good friends, of course," he said, "and I spent most of my time up there with him. When we got down below Cairo, and there was a big, full river—for it was high-water season and there was no danger of the boat hitting anything so long as she kept in the river—I had her most of the time on his watch. He would lie down and sleep, and leave me there to dream that the years had not slipped away; that there had been no war, no mining days, no literary adventures; that I was still a pilot, happy and care-free as I had been twenty years before."

Was it merely a sentimental regret, however poignant, that Mark Twain recorded in these words, a regret for

the passing of time and the charm and the hope of youth? That little note of deprecation regarding his "literary adventures" sets one thinking. It is not altogether flattering to the self-respect of a veteran man of letters! And besides, we say to ourselves, if that earlier vocation of his had been merely "happy and care-free" a man of Mark Twain's energy and power could hardly, in later life, have so idealized it. For idealize it he certainly did: all his days he looked back upon those four years on the Mississippi as upon a lost paradise. "I'd rather be a pilot than anything else I've ever done in my life," he told his old master, Horace Bixby. "I am a person," he wrote to Mr. Howells in 1874, "who would quit authorizing in a minute to go to piloting, if the Madam would stand it." Quite an obsession, we see; and that he had found that occupation deeply, actively satisfying, that it seemed to him infinitely worthy and beautiful is proved not only by the tender tone in which he habitually spoke of it but by the fact that the earlier pages of "Life on the Mississippi," in which he pictures it, are the most poetic, the most perfectly fused and expressive that he ever wrote.

It was not a sentimental regret, then, that lifelong hankering for the lost paradise of the pilot-house. It was something more organic, and Mark Twain provides us with an explanation. "If I have seemed to love my subject," he says, among the impassioned pages of his book, "it is no surprising thing, for I loved the profession far better than any I have followed since, and I took a measureless pride in it." A singular statement for a man to make out of the fullness of a literary life, the two pillars of which, if it has any pillars, are nothing else than love and pride! But Mark Twain writes those words with an almost unctuous gravity of conviction, and this, in so many words, is what he says: as a pilot he had experienced the full flow of the creative life as he had not experienced it in literature. Strange

as that may seem, we cannot question it; we have, simply, to explain it. The life of a Mississippi pilot had, in some special way, satisfied the instinct of the artist in him; in quite this way, the instinct of the artist in him had never been satisfied again. We do not have to look beyond this in order to interpret, if not the fact, at least the obsession. He felt that, in some way, he had been as a pilot on the right track; and he felt that he had lost this track. If he was always harking back to that moment, then, it was, we can hardly escape feeling, with a vague hope of finding again some scent that was very dear to him, of recovering some precious thread of destiny, of taking some fresh start. Is it possible that he had, in fact, found himself in his career as a pilot and lost himself with that career? It is a bold hypothesis, and yet I think a glance at Mark Twain's childhood will bear it out. We shall have to see first what sort of boy he was, and what sort of society it was he grew up in; then we shall be able to understand what unique opportunities for personal growth the career of a pilot afforded him.

What a social setting it was, that little world into which Mark Twain was born! It was drab, it was tragic. In "Huckleberry Finn" and "Tom Sawyer" we see it in the color of rose; and besides, we see there only a later phase of it, after Mark Twain's family had settled in Hannibal, on the Mississippi. He was five at the time; his eyes had opened on such a scene as we find in the early pages of "The Gilded Age." That weary, discouraged father, struggling against conditions amid which, as he says, a man can do nothing but rot away, that kind, worn, wan, desperately optimistic, fanatically energetic mother, those ragged, wretched little children, sprawling on the floor, "sopping corn-bread in some gravy left in the bottom of a frying-pan"—it is the epic not only of Mark Twain's infancy but of a whole phase

of American civilization. How many books have been published of late years letting us behind the scenes of the glamorous myth of pioneering! There is E. H. Howe's "Story of a Country Town," for instance, that Western counterpart in sodden misery of "Ethan Frome"—a book which has only begun to find its public. This astonishing Mr. Howe, who is so painfully honest, tells us in so many words that in all his early days he never saw a woman who was not anæmic and fretful, a man who was not moody and taciturn, a child who was not stunted from hard labor or under-nourishment. No wonder he has come to believe, as he tells us frankly in a later book, that there is no such thing as love in the world! Think of those villages Mark Twain himself has pictured for us, with their shabby, unpainted shacks, dropping with decay, the broken fences, the litter of rusty cans and foul rags, how like the leavings of some vast over-turned scrap-basket, some gigantic garbage-can! Human nature was not responsible for this débris of a too unequal combat with circumstance, nor could human nature rise above it. "Gambling, drinking and murder," we are told, were the diversions of the capital city of Nevada in the days of the gold-rush. It was not very different in normal times along the Mississippi. Hannibal was a small place; yet Mr. Paine records four separate murders which Mark Twain actually witnessed as a boy: every week he would see some drunken ruffian run amuck, he saw negroes struck down and killed, he saw men shot and stabbed in the streets. "How many gruesome experiences," exclaims Mr. Paine, "there appear to have been in those early days!" But let us be moderate: every one was not violent. As for the majority of the settlers, it is to the honor of mankind that history calls them heroes; and if that is an illusion, justice will never be realistic. The gods of Greece would have gone unwashed and turned gray at forty and lost

their digestion and neglected their children if they had been pioneers: Apollo himself would have relapsed into an irritable silence.

A desert of human sand!—the barrenest spot in all Christendom, surely, for the seed of genius to fall in. John Hay, revisiting these regions after having lived for several years in New England, wrote in one of his letters: "I am removed to a colder mental atmosphere. . . . I find only a dreary waste of heartless materialism, where great and heroic qualities may indeed bully their way up into the glare, but the flowers of existence inevitably droop and wither."

Here Mark Twain was born, and in a loveless household: the choice of his mother's heart, Mr. Paine tells us, had been "a young physician of Lexington with whom she had quarreled, and her prompt engagement with John Clemens was a matter of temper rather than tenderness." Mark Twain "did not remember ever having seen or heard his father laugh," we are told, and only once, when his little brother Benjamin lay dying, had he seen one member of his family kiss another. His father, absorbed in a perpetual motion machine, "seldom devoted any time to the company of his children." No wonder, poor man; the palsy of a long defeat lay upon him; besides, every spring he was prostrated with a nerve-racking "sun-pain" that would have checked the humane impulses of an archangel. Even his mother, the backbone of the family, was infatuated with patent medicines, "pain-killers," health periodicals—we have it from "Tom Sawyer"—"she was an inveterate experimenter in these things." They were all, we see, living on the edge of their nerves, a harsh, angular, desiccated existence, like so many rusty machines, without enough oil, without enough power, grating on their own metal.

Little Sam, as every one called him, was the fifth child in this household, "a puny baby with a wavering promise of life"; it is suggested that he was not wanted. Mr.

Paine speaks of him somewhere as "high-strung and neurotic." We are not surprised, therefore, to find him at three and four "a wild-headed, impetuous child of sudden ecstasies that sent him capering and swinging his arms, venting his emotions in a series of leaps and shrieks and somersaults, and spasms of laughter as he lay rolling in the grass." This is the child who is to retain through life that exquisite sensibility of which so many observers have spoken. "Once when I met him in the country," says Mr. Howells, for example, of his later life, "he had just been sickened by the success of a gunner in bringing down a blackbird; and he described the poor, stricken, glossy thing, how it lay throbbing its life out on the grass, with such pity as he might have given a wounded child." Already, in his infancy, his gentle, winning manner and smile make him every one's favorite. A very special little flower of life, you see, capable of such feeling that at twenty-three his hair is to turn gray in the tragic experience of his brother's death. A flower of life, a wild flower, and infinitely fragile: the doctor is always being called in his behalf. Before he grows up he is to have prophetic dreams, but now another neurotic symptom manifests itself. In times of family crisis, at four, when one of his sisters is dying, at twelve, after the death of his father, he walks in his sleep: often the rest of the household get up in the middle of the night to find this delicate little waif with his eyes shut "fretting with cold in some dark corner."

Can we not already see in this child the born, predestined artist? And what sort of nurture will his imagination have? He is abandoned to the fervid influences of the negro slaves,—for his father had moments of a relative prosperity. Crouching in their cabins, he drinks in wild, weird tales of blood-curdling African witchcraft. "Certainly," says Mr. Paine, "an atmosphere like this meant a tropic development for the imagination of a delicate child." One thinks in-

deed of an image that would have pleased Heine, the image of a frail snow-plant of the North quivering, flaming in the furnace of the jungle. Mark Twain appears to have been from the outset a center of interest, radiating a singular potency; and the more his spirit was subjected to such a fearful stimulus the more urgently he required for his normal development the calm, clairvoyant guidance a pioneer child could never have had. The negroes were "in real charge of the children and supplied them with entertainment." What other influence was there to counterbalance this?

One, and one only, an influence tragic in its ultimate consequences, the influence of Mark Twain's mother. That poor, taciturn, sunstruck failure, John Clemens, was a mere pathetic shadow beside the woman whose portrait Mark Twain has drawn for us in the Aunt Polly of "Tom Sawyer." She who was regarded as a "character" by all the town, who was said to have been "the handsomest girl and the wittiest, as well as the best dancer, in all Kentucky," who was still able to dance at 80, and lived to be 87, who belonged, in short, to "the long-lived, energetic side of the house," directed her children, we are told—and we can believe it—"with considerable firmness." And what was the inevitable relationship between her and this little boy? "She had a weakness," says Mr. Paine, "for the child that demanded most of her mother's care . . . All were tractable and growing in grace but little Sam . . . a delicate little lad to be worried over, mothered, or spanked and put to bed." In later life, "you gave me more uneasiness than any child I had," she told him. In fact, she was always scolding him, comforting him, forgiving him, punishing and pleading with him, fixing her attention upon him, exercising her emotions about him, impressing it upon his mind for all time, as we shall come to see.

that woman is the inevitable seat of authority and the fount of wisdom.

We know that such excessive influences are apt to deflect the growth of any spirit. Men are like planets in this, that for them to sail clear in their own orbits the forces of gravity have to be disposed with a certain balance on all sides: how often, when the father counts for nothing, a child becomes the satellite of its mother, especially when that mother's love has not found its normal expression in her own youth! We have seen that Mark Twain's mother did not love her husband; that her capacity for love, however, was very great is proved by the singular story revealed in one of Mark Twain's letters: more than sixty years after she had quarreled with that young Lexington doctor, and when her husband had long been dead, she, a woman of eighty or more, took a railway journey to a distant city where there was an Old Settlers' convention because among the names of those who were to attend it she had noticed the name of the lover of her youth. "Who could have imagined such a heart-break as that?" said Mr. Howells, when he heard the story. "Yet it went along with the fulfillment of every-day duty and made no more noise than a grave under foot." It made no noise, but it undoubtedly had a prodigious effect upon Mark Twain's life. When an affection as intense as that is balked in its direct path and repressed it usually, as we know, finds an indirect outlet; and it is plain that the woman as well as the mother expressed itself in the passionate attachment of Jane Clemens to her son. We shall note many consequences of this fact as we go on with our story. We can say at least at this point that Mark Twain was, quite definitely, in his mother's leading-strings.

What was the inevitable result? I have said, not, I hope, with too much presumption, that Mark Twain had

already shown himself the born, predestined artist, that his whole nature manifested what is called a tendency toward the creative life. For that tendency to become conscious, to become purposive, two things were necessary: it must be able, in the first place, to assert itself and in the second place to embody itself in a vocation; to realize itself and then to educate itself, to realize itself in educating itself. And, as we know, the influences of early childhood are, in these matters, vitally important. If Jane Clemens had been a woman of wide experience and independent mind, in proportion to the strength of her character, Mark Twain's career might have been wholly different. Had she been catholic in her sympathies, in her understanding of life, then, no matter how more than maternal her attachment to her son was, she might have placed before him and encouraged him to pursue interests and activities amid which he could eventually have recovered his balance, reduced the filial bond to its normal measure and stood on his own feet. But that is to wish for a type of woman our old pioneer society could never have produced. We are told that the Aunt Polly of "Tom Sawyer" is a speaking portrait of Jane Clemens, and Aunt Polly, as we know, was the symbol of all the taboos. The stronger her will was, the more comprehensive were her repressions, the more certainly she became the inflexible guardian of tradition in a social régime where tradition was inalterably opposed to every sort of personal deviation from the accepted type. "In their remoteness from the political centers of the young Republic," says Mr. Howells, in "The Leatherwood God," of these old Middle Western settlements, "they seldom spoke of the civic questions stirring the towns of the East; the commercial and industrial problems which vex modern society were unknown to them. Religion was their chief interest." And in the slave States it was not the abolitionist alone whose name was held, as Mr. Paine says, "in horror,"

but every one who had the audacity to think differently from his neighbors. Jane Clemens, in short, was the embodiment of that old-fashioned, cast-iron Calvinism which had proved so favorable to the life of enterprising action but which perceived the scent of the devil in any least expression of what is now known as the creative impulse. She had a kind heart, she was always repenting and softening and forgiving; it is said that whenever she had to drown kittens, she warmed the water first. But this, without opening any channel in a contrary direction, only sealed her authority! She won her points as much by kindness as by law. Besides, tradition spoke first in her mind; her hand was quicker than her heart; in action she was the madonna of the hairbrush. And what, specifically, was it that she punished? Those furtive dealings of Huck and Tom with whitewash and piracy were nothing in the world—and that is why all the world loves them—but the first stirrings of the normal æsthetic sense, the first stirrings of individuality.

Already I think we divine what was bound to happen in the soul of Mark Twain. The story of "Huckleberry Finn" turns, as we remember, upon a conflict: "the author," says Mr. Paine, "makes Huck's struggle a psychological one between conscience and the law, on one side, and sympathy on the other." In the famous episode of Nigger Jim, "sympathy," the cause of individual freedom, wins. Years later, in "The Mysterious Stranger," Mark Twain presented the parallel situation we noted in the last chapter: "we found," says the boy who tells that story, "that we were not manly enough nor brave enough to do a generous action when there was a chance that it could get us into trouble." Conscience and the law, we see, had long since prevailed in the spirit of Mark Twain, but what is the conscience of a boy who checks a humane impulse but "boy terror," as Mr. Paine calls it, an instinctive fear of custom, of tribal authority? The conflict in "Huckleberry Finn"

is simply the conflict of Mark Twain's own childhood. He solved it successfully, he fulfilled his desire, in the book, as an author can. In actual life he did not solve it at all; he surrendered.

Turn to the record in Mr. Paine's biography. We find Mark Twain in perpetual revolt against all those institutions for which his mother stood. "Church ain't worth shucks," says Tom Sawyer. As for school, "he never learned to like it. Each morning he went with reluctance and remained with loathing—the loathing which he always had for anything resembling bondage and tyranny or even the smallest curtailment of liberty." One recalls what Huck said of Aunt Polly just before he made his escape to the woods:

> "Don't talk about it, Tom. I've tried it and it don't work; it don't work, Tom. It ain't for me; I ain't used to it. The widder's good to me, and friendly; but I can't stand them ways. She makes me git up just at the same time every morning; she makes me wash, they comb me all to thunder; she won't let me sleep in the woodshed; I got to wear them blamed clothes that just smothers me, Tom; they don't seem to any air get through 'em somehow, and they're so rotten nice that I can't set down, nor lay down, nor roll around anywher's; I hain't slid on a cellar-door for—well, it 'pears to be years; I got to go to church and sweat and sweat—I hate them ornery sermons! I can't ketch a fly in there, I can't chaw, I got to wear shoes all Sunday. The widder eats by a bell; she goes to bed by a bell; she gits up by a bell—everything's so awful reg'lar a body can't stand it."

But Mark Twain did not escape to the woods, literally or in any other way. He never even imagined that his feelings of revolt had any justification. We remember how, when Huck and Tom were caught in some escapade, they would resolve to "lead a better life," to go to church, visit the sick, carry them baskets of food and subsist wholly upon tracts. That was what Mark Twain did: "not to do so," says Mr. Paine, "was dangerous. Flames were being kept brisk for little boys who were heedless of sacred matters; his home teaching convinced

him of that." And his mother was so strong, so courageous, the only strong and courageous influence he knew. "In some vague way," says Mr. Paine, "he set them down"—the fearful spectacles of escaping slaves, caught and beaten and sold—"as warnings, or punishments, designed to give him a taste for a better life." Warnings, in short, not to tempt Providence himself, not to play with freedom! "He felt that it was his own conscience that made these things torture him. That was his mother's idea, and he had a high respect for her moral opinions." Naturally! And she "punished him and pleaded with him, alternately"—with one inevitable result. " 'To fear God and dread the Sunday School,' " he wrote to Mr. Howells in later years, "exactly described that old feeling which I used to have"; and he tells us also that as a boy he wanted to be a preacher, "because it never occurred to me that a preacher could be damned." Can we not see that already the boy whose interests and preferences and activities diverge from those of the accepted type had become in his eyes the "bad" boy, that individuality itself, not to mention the creative life, had become for him identical with "sin"?

Many a great writer, many a great artist, no doubt, has grown up and flourished like a blade of grass between the cobblestones of Calvinism. Scotland has a tale to tell. But Scotland has other strains, other traditions, books and scholars, gaieties, nobilities—how can we compare the fertile human soil of any spot in Europe with that dry, old, barren, horizonless Middle West of ours? How was Mark Twain to break the spell of his infancy and find a vocation there? Calvinism itself had gone to seed: it was nothing but the dead hand of custom; the flaming priest had long since given way to the hysterical evangelist. Grope as he might, he could find nowhere, either in men or in books, the bread and wine of the spirit. In all his youth, unless we except that journeyman chair-maker, Frank Burrough, who

had a taste for Dickens and Thackeray, there is record of only one thinking soul whom he encountered, a Scotchman named Macfarlane, whom he met in Cincinnati. "They were long fermenting discourses," Mr. Paine tells us, "that young Samuel Clemens listened to that winter in Macfarlane's room." And what was the counsel which, from that sole source, his blind and wavering aptitude received?—that "man's heart was the only bad one in the animal kingdom, that man was the only animal capable of malice, vindictiveness, drunkenness" and that his intellect was only a "depraving addition to him which, in the end, placed him in a rank far below the other beasts." Propitious words for this candidate for the art of living! And as with men, so it was with books. In "Life on the Mississippi" there is a memorable picture of the library in the typical gentleman's house all the way from St. Louis to New Orleans: Martin Tupper, "Friendship's Offering," "Affection's Wreath," Ossian, "Alonzo and Melissa," "Ivanhoe," and "Godey's Lady's Book," "piled and disposed with cast-iron exactness, according to an inherited and unchangeable plan." How, indeed, could the cultural background of that society have been anything but stagnant when no fresh stream of cultural interest could possibly penetrate through the foreground? One day, in the dusty, littered streets of Hannibal, Mark Twain picked up a loose page, the page of some life of Joan of Arc, which was flying in the wind. That seed, so planted, was to blossom half a century later: even now it began to put forth little tentative shoots. "It gave him his cue," says Mr. Paine, "the first word of a part in the human drama," and he conceived a sudden interest in history and languages. Anything might have come of that impulse if it had had the least protection, if it had been able to find a guideway. As a matter of fact, as a matter of course, it perished in a joke.

In all his environment, then, we see, there was nothing to assist in the transformation of an unconscious artistic instinct, however urgent, into a conscious artistic purpose. "Dahomey," wrote Mark Twain once, "could not find an Edison out; in Dahomey an Edison could not find himself out. Broadly speaking, genius is not born with sight but blind; and it is not itself that opens its eyes, but the subtle influences of a myriad of stimulating exterior circumstances." He was reciting his own story in those words. But the circumstances that surrounded Mark Twain were not merely passively unfavorable to his own self-discovery; they were actively, overwhelmingly unfavorable. He was in his mother's leading-strings, and in his mother's eyes any sort of personal self-assertion in choices, preferences, impulses was, literally, sinful. Thus the whole weight of the Calvinistic tradition was concentrated against him at his most vulnerable point. His mother, whom he could not gainsay, was unconsciously but inflexibly set against his genius; and destiny, which always fights on the side of the heaviest artillery, delivered, in his twelfth year, a stroke that sealed her victory.

Mark Twain's father died. Let Mr. Paine picture the scene:

"The boy Sam was fairly broken down. Remorse, which always dealt with him unsparingly, laid a heavy hand on him now. Wildness, disobedience, indifference to his father's wishes, all were remembered; a hundred things, in themselves trifling, became ghastly and heart-wringing in the knowledge that they could never be undone. Seeing his grief, his mother took him by the hand and led him into the room where his father lay. 'It is all right, Sammy,' she said. 'What's done is done, and it does not matter to him any more; but here by the side of him now I want you to promise me——.' He turned, his eyes streaming with tears, and flung himself into her arms. 'I will promise anything,' he sobbed,

'if you won't make me go to school! Anything!' His mother held him for a moment, thinking, then she said: 'No, Sammy, you need not go to school any more. Only promise me to be a better boy. Promise not to break my heart.' So he promised her to be a faithful and industrious man, and upright, like his father. His mother was satisfied with that. The sense of honor and justice was already strong within him. To him a promise was a serious matter at any time; made under conditions like these it would be held sacred. That night —it was after the funeral—his tendency to somnambulism manifested itself. His mother and sister, who were sleeping together, saw the door open and a form in white enter. Naturally nervous at such a time, and living in a day of almost universal superstition, they were terrified and covered their heads. Presently a hand was laid on the coverlet, first at the foot, then at the head of the bed. A thought struck Mrs. Clemens: 'Sam!' she said. He answered, but he was sound asleep and fell to the floor. He had risen and thrown a sheet around him in his dreams. He walked in his sleep several nights in succession after that. Then he slept more soundly."

Who is sufficiently the master of signs and portents to read this terrible episode aright? One thing, however, we feel with irresistible certitude, that Mark Twain's fate was once for all decided there. That hour by his father's corpse, that solemn oath, that walking in his sleep—we must hazard some interpretation of it all, and I think we are justified in hazarding as most likely that which explains the most numerous and the most significant phenomena of his later life.

To a hypersensitive child such as Mark Twain was at eleven that ceremonious confrontation with his father's corpse must, in the first place, have brought a profound nervous shock. Already, we are told, he was "broken down" by his father's death; remorse had "laid a heavy

hand on him." But what was this remorse; what had he done for grief or shame? "A hundred things in themselves trifling," which had offended, in reality, not his father's heart but his father's will as a conventional citizen with a natural desire to raise up a family in his own likeness. Feeble, frantic, furtive little feelings-out of this moody child, the first wavering steps of the soul, that is what they have really been, these peccadillos, the dawn of the artist. And the formidable promptings of love tell him that they are sin! He is broken down indeed; all those crystalline fragments of individuality, still so tiny and so fragile, are suddenly shattered; his nature, wrought upon by the tense heat of that hour, has become again like soft wax. And his mother stamps there, with awful ceremony, the composite image of her own meager traditions. He is to go forth the Good Boy by *force majeure,* he is to become such a man as his father would have approved of, he is to retrieve his father's failure, to recover the lost gentility of a family that had once been proud, to realize that "mirage of wealth" that had ever hung before his father's eyes. And to do so he is not to quarrel heedlessly with his bread and butter, he is to keep strictly within the code, to remember the maxims of Ben Franklin, to respect all the prejudices and all the conventions; above all, he is not to be drawn aside into any fanciful orbit of his own! . . . Hide your faces, Huck and Tom! Put away childish things, Sam Clemens; go forth into the world, but remain always a child, your mother's child! In a day to come you will write to one of your friends, "We have no *real* morals, but only artificial ones—morals created and preserved by the forced suppression of natural and healthy instincts." Never mind that now; your mother imagines her heart is in the balance—will you break it? . . . Will you promise? . . . And the little boy, in the terror of that presence, sobs: "Anything!"

"There is in every man," said Sainte-Beuve, "a poet who dies young." In truth, the poet does not die; he falls into a fitful trance. It is perfectly evident what happened to Mark Twain at this moment: he became, and his immediate manifestation of somnambulism is the proof of it, a dual personality. If I were sufficiently hardy, as I am not, I should say that that little sleep-walker who appeared at Jane Clemens's bedside on the night of her husband's funeral was the spirit of Tom Sawyer, come to demand again the possession of his own soul, to revoke that ruthless promise he had given. He came for several nights, and then, we are told, the little boy slept more soundly, a sign, one might say, if one were a fortune-teller, that he had grown accustomed to the new and difficult rôle of being two people at once! The subject of dual personality was always, as we shall see, an obsession with Mark Twain; he who seemed to his friends such a natural-born actor, who was, in childhood, susceptible not only to somnambulism but to mesmeric control, had shown from the outset a distinct tendency toward what is called dissociation of consciousness. His "wish" to be an artist, which has been so frowned upon and has encountered such an insurmountable obstacle in the disapproval of his mother, is now repressed, more or less definitely, and another wish, that of winning approval, which inclines him to conform with public opinion, has supplanted it. The individual, in short, has given way to the type. The struggle between these two selves, these two tendencies, these two wishes or groups of wishes, will continue throughout Mark Twain's life, and the poet, the artist, the individual, will make a brave effort to survive. From the death of his father onward, however, his will is definitely enlisted on the side opposed to his essential instinct.

When, a few years later, Mark Twain leaves home on his first excursion into the great world, he gladly takes

the oath, which his mother administers, "not to throw a card or drink a drop of liquor" while he is away, an oath she seals with a kiss. To obey Jane Clemens, to do what seems good in her eyes, not to try life and make his own rejections, has become actually pleasing to him; it is his own will to make the journey of life "in bond," as surely as any box that was ever sent by freight. Never was an adolescence more utterly objective than Mr. Paine's record shows Mark Twain's to have been! For several years before he was twenty-one he drifted about as a journeyman printer: he went as far East as Washington, Philadelphia and New York. This latter journey lasted more than a year; one might have expected it to open before him an immense horizon; yet he seems, to judge from his published letters, to have experienced not one of the characteristic thoughts or feelings of youth. Never a hint of melancholy, of aspiration, of hope, depression, joy, even ambition! His letters are as full of statistics as the travel-reports of an engineer, and the only sensation he seems to experience is the tell-tale sensation of home-sickness. He has no wish to investigate life, to think, to feel, to love. He is, in fact, under a spell. He is inhibited, he inhibits himself, even from seeking on his own account that vital experience which is the stuff of the creative life.

Then, suddenly, comes a revolutionary change. He hears "the old call of the river." He becomes a pilot.

Mr. Paine expresses surprise that Mark Twain should have embarked upon this career with such passionate earnestness, that the man whom the world was to know later—"dreamy, unpractical, and indifferent to details" —should ever have persisted in acquiring the "absolutely limitless" knowledge it necessitated. He explains it by the fact that Mark Twain "loved the river in its every mood and aspect and detail, and not only the river, but a steamboat; and still more, perhaps, the freedom of the pilot's life and its prestige." Mr. Paine

omits one important particular. We have seen that in Mark Twain two opposed groups of wishes—the wish to be an artist and the wish to win his mother's approval, to stand in with pioneer society—were struggling for survival. When we turn to his account of the Mississippi pilots, their life, their activities, their social position, we can see that in this career both these wishes were satisfied concurrently. Piloting was, in the first place, a preëminently respectable and lucrative occupation; besides this, of all the pioneer types of the Mississippi region, the pilot alone embodied in any large measure the characteristics of the artist: in him alone these characteristics were permitted, in him they were actually encouraged, to survive.

We cannot understand why this was so without bearing in mind a peculiarity of the pioneer régime upon which we shall have occasion more than once to dwell. Mr. Herbert Croly has described it in "The Promise of American Life." "In such a society," says Mr. Croly, "a man who persisted in one job, and who applied the most rigorous and exacting standards to his work, was out of place and was really inefficient. His finished product did not serve its temporary purpose much better than did the current careless and hasty product and his higher standards and peculiar ways constituted an implied criticism upon the easy methods of his neighbors. He interfered with the rough good-fellowship which naturally arises among a group of men who submit good-naturedly and uncritically to current standards. It is no wonder, consequently, that the pioneer democracy viewed with distrust and aversion the man with a special vocation and high standards of achievement. Such a man did insist upon being in certain respects better than the average; and under the prevalent economic social conditions he did impair the consistency of feeling upon which the pioneers rightly placed such a high value. Consequently, they half

unconsciously sought to suppress men with special vocations."

Here, of course, we have what is by far the most important fact to be considered in any study of the creative life in the West; as we shall see, Mark Twain remained all his life in this sense a pioneer in his own view of the "special vocation" of literature. What is to be noted now is that the pilot was an exception, and the only exception in the Mississippi region, to this general social law. In Nevada, in California, where Mark Twain was to live later and where he was to begin his literary life, there were no exceptions; the system described by Mr. Croly reigned in its most extreme and uncompromising form; every one had to be a jack-of-all-trades, every one had to live by his wits. The entire welfare, almost the existence, of the population of the Mississippi valley, on the other hand, depended, before the war, upon the expert skill of the pilot; for the river traffic to be secure at all, he alone, but he at least, had to be a craftsman, a specialist of the very highest order. There were no signal-lights along the shore, we are told; the river was full of snags and shifting sand-bars; the pilot had to know every bank and dead tree and reef, every cut-off and current, every depth of water, by day and by night, in the whole stretch of twelve hundred miles between St. Louis and New Orleans; he had to "smell danger in the dark and read the surface of the water as an open page." Upon his mastery of that "supreme science," as it was called, hung all the civilization of the river folk, their trade, their intercourse with the great centers, everything that stirred them out of the inevitable stagnation of an isolated village existence. The pilot was, consequently, in every sense an anomaly, a privileged person, a "sovereign." Not only did he receive commands from nobody but he was authorized to resent even the merest suggestion. "I have seen a boy of eighteen," Mark Twain tells us,

"taking a great steamer serenely into what seemed almost certain destruction, and the aged captain standing mutely by, filled with apprehension but powerless to interfere." Pilots were, he says, "treated with marked deference by all, officers and servants and passengers," and he adds naïvely: "I think pilots were about the only people I ever knew who failed to show, in some degree, embarrassment in the presence of traveling foreign princes." Above all, and this was the anomaly to which Mark Twain, after many years of experience in American society, recurs with most significant emphasis, the pilot was morally free: thanks to the indispensability of that highly skilled vocation of his, he and he alone possessed the sole condition without which the creative instinct cannot survive and grow. "A pilot in those days," he says, with tragic exaggeration, "was the only unfettered and entirely independent human being that lived in the earth. Kings are but the manacled servants of parliaments and the people . . . the editor of a newspaper . . . clergymen . . . writers of all kinds are manacled servants of the public. We write frankly and fearlessly, but then we 'modify' before we print. In truth, every man and woman and child has a master, and worries and frets in servitude; but, in the day I write of, the Mississippi pilot had none."

Can we not see, then, how inevitably the figure of the pilot became a sort of channel for all the æsthetic idealism of the Mississippi region? "When I was a boy," Mark Twain says, "there was but one permanent ambition among my comrades in our village. That was, to be a steamboatman. We had transient ambitions of other sorts, but they were only transient." Think of the squalor of those villages, their moral and material squalor, their dim and ice-bound horizon, their petty taboos: repression at one extreme, eruption at the other, and shiftlessness for a golden mean. "You can hardly

imagine," said Mark Twain once, "you can hardly imagine what it meant to a boy in those days, shut in as we were, to see those steamboats pass up and down." They were indeed "floating enchantments," beautiful, comely, clean—first rate, for once! not second, or third, or fourth—light and bright and gay, radiating a sort of transcendent self-respect, magnetic in its charm, its cheerfulness, its trim vigor. And what an air they had of *going* somewhere, of *getting* somewhere, of knowing what they were about, of having an orbit of their own and wilfully, deliberately, delightfully pursuing it! Stars, in short, pillars of fire in that baffling twilight of mediocrity, nonentity, cast-iron taboos and catchpenny opportunism. And the pilot! Mark Twain tells how he longed to be a cabin boy, to do any menial work about the decks in order to serve the majestic boats and their worthy sovereigns. Of what are we reminded but the breathless, the fructifying adoration of a young apprentice in the atelier of some great master of the Renaissance? And we are right. Mark Twain's soul is that of the artist, and what we see unfolding itself is indeed the natural passion of the novice lavished, for love of the *métier,* upon the only creative—shall I say? —at least the only purposive figure in all his experience. Think of the phrases that figure evokes in "Life on the Mississippi": "By the Shadow of Death, but he's a lightning pilot!" It was in this fashion that comrades of the wheel spoke of one another. "You just ought to have seen him take this boat through Helena Crossing. I never saw anything so gaudy before. And if he can do such gold-leaf, kid-glove, diamond breast-pin piloting when he is sound asleep, what couldn't he do if he was dead!" The adjectives suggest the barbaric magnificence of the pilot's costume, for in his costume, too, the visible sign of a salary as great as that of the Vice-President of the United States, he was a privileged person. But the accent is unmistakable. It is an out-

burst of pure æsthetic emotion, produced by a supreme exercise of personal craftsmanship.

Mark Twain had his chance at last! "I wandered for ten years," he said in later life, when he used to assert so passionately that man is a mere chameleon, who takes his color from his surroundings, a passive agent of his environment, "I wandered for ten years, under the guidance and dictatorship of Circumstance. . . . Then Circumstance arrived with another turning-point of my life—a new link. . . . I had made the acquaintance of a pilot. I begged him to teach me the river, and he consented. I became a pilot." He had come to believe that he had drifted into piloting and out of it quite as aimlessly as he had drifted into and out of so many other occupations. But that hardly bears out his other assertion that to be a pilot was the "permanent ambition" of his childhood. Two instincts had impelled him all along, the instinct to seek a lucrative and respectable position of which his mother would approve and the instinct to develop himself as an artist: already as a printer he had exhibited an enthusiastic interest in craftsmanship. "He was a rapid learner and a neat worker," we are told, "a good workman, faithful and industrious;" "he set a clean proof," his brother Orion said. "Whatever required intelligence and care and imagination," adds Mr. Paine, of those printing days, "was given to Sam Clemens." He had naturally gravitated, therefore, toward the one available channel that offered him the training his artistic instinct required. And the proof is that Mark Twain, in order to take advantage of that opportunity, gladly submitted to all manner of conditions of a sort that he was wholly unwilling to submit to at any later period of his life.

In the first place, he had no money, and he was under a powerful compulsion to make money at almost any cost. Yet, in order to pass his apprenticeship, he agreed not only to forgo all remuneration until his apprentice-

ship was completed, but to find somehow, anyhow, the five hundred dollars, a large sum indeed for him, which was the price of his tuition. And then, most striking fact of all, he took pains, endless, unremitting pains, to make himself competent. It was a tremendous task, how tremendous every one knows who has read "Life on the Mississippi": "even considering his old-time love of the river and the pilot's trade," says Mr. Paine, "it is still incredible that a man of his temperament could have persisted, as he did, against such obstacles." The answer is to be found only in the fact that, embarked as he was at last on a career that called supremely for self-reliance, independence, initiative, judgment, skill, his nature was rapidly crystallizing. "Sum all the gifts that man is endowed with," he writes to his brother Orion, "and we give our greatest share of admiration to his energy. And to-day, if I were a heathen, I would rear a statue to Energy, and fall down and worship it! I want a man to—I want *you* to—take up a line of action, and *follow* it out, in spite of the very devil." Is this the Mark Twain who, in later life, reading in Seutonius of one Flavius Clemens, a man in wide repute "for his want of energy," wrote on the margin of the book, "I guess this is where our line starts"?

Mark Twain had found his cue, incredible as it must have seemed in that shiftless half-world of the Mississippi, and he was following it for dear life. We note in him at this time an entire lack of the humor of his later days: he is taut as one of the hawsers of his own boat; he is, if not altogether a grave, brooding soul, at least a frankly poetic one, meditating at night in his pilot-house on "life, death, the reason of existence, of creation, the ways of Providence and Destiny," overflowing with a sense of power, of purpose, of direction, of control. "I used to have inspirations," he said once, "as I sat there alone those nights. I used to imagine all sorts of situations and possibilities. Those things got

into my books by and by and furnished me with many a chapter. I can trace the effect of those nights through most of my books in one way and another." He who had so loathed every sort of intellectual discipline, who had run away from school with the inevitability of water flowing down hill, set himself to study, to learn, with a passion of eagerness. Earlier, at the time when he had picked up that flying leaf from the life of Joan of Arc, he had suddenly seized the moment's inspiration to study Latin and German; but the impulse had not lasted, could not last. Now, however, nothing was too difficult for him. He bought text-books and applied himself when he was off watch and in port. "The pilots," says Mr. Paine, "regarded him as a great reader —a student of history, travels, literature, and the sciences—a young man whom it was an education as well as an entertainment to know."

Mark Twain was pressing forward, with all sails set. "How to Take Life" is the subject of one of his jottings: "Take it just as though it was—as it is—an earnest, vital, and important affair. Take it as though you were born to the task of performing a merry part in it —as though the world had waited for your coming. . . . Now and then a man stands aside from the crowd, labors earnestly, steadfastly, confidently, and straightway becomes famous for wisdom, intellect, skill, greatness of some sort. The world wonders, admires, idolizes, and it only illustrates what others may do if they take hold of life with a purpose. The miracle or the power that elevates the few is to be found in their industry, application and perseverance, under the promptings of a brave, determined spirit."

It is impossible to mistake the tone of this juvenile sentiment: it is the emotion of a man who feels himself in the center of the road of his own destiny.

## CHAPTER III

### THE GILDED AGE

"The American democracy follows its ascending march, uniform, majestic as the laws of being, sure of itself as the decrees of eternity."

GEORGE BANCROFT.

YOU conceive this valiant spirit, the golden thread in his hands, feeling his way with firmer grasp, with surer step, through the dim labyrinth of that pioneer world. He will not always be a pilot; he is an artist born; some day he is going to be a writer. And what a magnificent nursery for his talent he has found at last! "In that brief, sharp schooling," he said once, "I got personally and familiarly acquainted with all the different types of human nature that are to be found in fiction, biography or history. When I find a well-drawn character in fiction or biography, I generally take a warm personal interest in him, for the reason that I have known him before—met him on the river."

Yes, it ought to serve him well, that experience, it ought to equip him for a supreme interpretation of American life; it ought to serve him as the streets of London served Dickens, as the prison life of Siberia served Dostoievsky, as the Civil War hospitals served Whitman. But will it? Only if the artist in him can overcome the pioneer. Those great writers used their experience simply as grist for the mill of a profound personal vision; rising above it themselves, they im-

posed upon it the mold of their own individuality. Can Mark Twain keep the golden thread in his hands long enough? As a pilot he is not merely storing his mind with knowledge of men and their ways; he is forming indispensable habits of mind, self-confidence, self-respect, judgment, workmanlike behavior, he is redeeming his moral freedom. But has he quite found himself, has his nature had time to crystallize? No, and the time is up. Circumstance steps in and cuts the golden thread, and all is lost.

The Civil War, with its blockade of the Mississippi, put an end forever to the glories of the old river traffic. That unique career, the pilot's career, which had afforded Mark Twain the rudiments of a creative education, came to an abrupt end.

Nothing could be more startling, more significant, than the change instantly registered by this fact in Mark Twain's life. What happened to him? He has told us in "The Story of a Campaign That Failed," that exceedingly dubious episode of his three weeks' career as a soldier in the Confederate Army. Mark Twain was undoubtedly right in feeling that he had no cause for shame in having so ignominiously taken up arms and a military title only to desert on the pretext of a swollen ankle. The whole story simply reflects the confusion and misunderstanding with which, especially in the border States, the Civil War began. What it does reveal, however, is a singular childishness, a sort of infantility, in fact, that is very hard to reconcile with the character of any man of twenty-six and especially one who, a few weeks before, had been a river "sovereign," the master of a great steamboat, a worshiper of energy and purpose, in short the Mark Twain we have just seen. They met, that amateur battalion, in a secret place on the outskirts of Hannibal, and there, says Mr. Paine, "they planned how they would sell their lives on the field of glory just as Tom Sawyer's band might have

done if it had thought about playing 'war' instead of 'Indian' and 'Pirate' and 'Bandit' with fierce raids on peach orchards and melon patches." Mark Twain's brief career as a soldier exhibited, as we see, just the characteristics of a "throw-back," a reversion to a previous infantile frame of mind. Was the apparent control which he had established over his life merely illusory, then? No, it was real enough as long as it was fortified by the necessary conditions: had those conditions continued a little longer, one feels certain, that self-control would have become organic and Mark Twain would never have had to deny "free will," would never, in later years, have been led to assert so passionately that man is a mere chameleon. But the habit of moral independence, of self-determination, was so new to this man who had passed his whole adolescence in his mother's leading-strings, the old, dependent, chaotic, haphazard pioneer instinct of his childhood so deep-seated, that the moment these fortifying conditions were removed he slipped back into the boy he had been before. He had lost his one opportunity, the one guideway that Western life could afford the artist in him. For four years his life had been motivated by the ideal of craftsmanship: nothing stood between him now and a world given over to exploitation.

A boy just out of school! It was in this frame of mind, committing himself gaily to chance, that he went West with his brother Orion to the Nevada gold-fields. One recalls the tense, passionate young figure of the pilot-house exhorting his brother to "take up a line of action, and follow it out, in spite of the very devil," jotting in his note-book eager and confident reflections on the duty of "taking hold of life with a purpose." In these words from "Roughing It," he pictures the change in his mood: "Nothing helps scenery like ham and eggs. Ham and eggs, and after these a pipe—an old, rank, delicious pipe—ham and eggs and scenery, a 'down-grade,'

a flying coach, a fragrant pipe, and a contented heart —these make happiness. It is what all the ages have struggled for." A down-grade, going West: he is "on the loose," you see; that will, that purpose have become a bore even to think about! And who could wish him less human? Only one who knows the fearful retribution his own soul is going to exact of him. He is innocently, frankly yielding himself to life, unaware in his joyous sense of freedom that he is no longer really free, that he is bound once more by all the compulsions of his childhood.

But now, in order to understand what happened to Mark Twain, we shall have to break the thread of his personal history. "The influences about [the human being]," he wrote, years later, "create his preferences, his aversions, his politics, his tastes, his morals, his religion. He creates none of these things for himself." That, as we shall see, was Mark Twain's deduction from his own life. Consequently, we must glance now at the epoch and the society to which, at this critical moment of his career, he was so gaily, so trustfully committing himself.

What was that epoch? It was the round half-century that began in the midst of the Civil War, reached its apogee in the seventies and eighties and its climacteric in the nineties of the last century, with the beginning of the so-called "Progressive Movement," and came to an indeterminate conclusion, by the kindness of heaven, shortly before the war of 1914. It was the epoch of industrial pioneering, the Gilded Age, as Mark Twain called it in the title of his only novel, the age when presidents were business men and generals were business men and preachers were business men, when the whole psychic energy of the American people was absorbed in the exploitation and the organization of the material resources of the continent and business enter-

prise was virtually the only recognized sphere of action. One recalls the career of Charles Francis Adams. A man of powerful individual character, he was certainly intended by nature to carry on the traditions of disinterested public effort he had inherited from three generations of ancestors. Casting about for a career immediately after the Civil War, however, he was able to find in business alone, as he has told us in his Autobiography, the proper scope for his energies. "Surveying the whole field," he says, "instinctively recognizing my unfitness for the law, I fixed on the railroad system as the most developing force and largest field of the day, and determined to attach myself to it." And how fully, by the end of his life, he had come to accept the values of his epoch—in spite of that tell-tale "otherwise-mindedness" of his—we can see from these candid words: "As to politics, it is a game; art, science, literature, we know how fashions change! . . . What I now find I would really have liked is something quite different. I would like to have accumulated—and ample and frequent opportunity for so doing was offered me—one of those vast fortunes of the present day rising up into the tens and scores of millions—what is vulgarly known as 'money to burn' . . . I would like to be the nineteenth century John Harvard—the John-Harvard-of-the-Money-Bags, if you will. I would rather be that than be Historian or General or President."

Less than ever, then, after the Civil War, can America be said to have offered "a career open to all talents." It offered only one career, that of sharing in the material development of the continent. Into this one channel passed all the religious fervor of the race.

I have spoken of Mark Twain's novel. It is not a good novel; it is, artistically, almost an unqualified failure. And yet, as inferior works often do, it conveys the spirit of its time; it tells, that is to say, a story which, in default of any other and better, might

well be called the Odyssey of modern America. Philip Sterling, the hero, is in love with Ruth Bolton, the daughter of a rich Quaker, and his ambition is to make money so that he may marry her and establish a home. Philip goes West in search of a coal-mine. He is baffled in his quest again and again. "He still had faith that there was coal in that mountain. He had made a picture of himself living there a hermit in a shanty by the tunnel. . . . Perhaps some day—he felt it must be so some day—he would strike coal. But what if he did? Would he be alive to care for it then? . . . No, a man wants riches in his youth, when the world is fresh to him. . . . Philip had to look about him. He was like Adam: the world was all before him where to choose." Routed by the stubborn mountain, he persists in his dream: again he goes back to it and toils on. "Three or four times in as many weeks he said to himself: 'Am I a visionary? I *must* be a visionary!'" His workers desert him: "after that, Philip fought his battle alone." Once more he begins to have doubts: "I am conquered. . . . I have got to give it up. . . . But I am not conquered. I will go and work for money, and come back and have another fight with fate. Ah, me, it may be years, it may be years!" And then, at last, when the hour is blackest, he strikes the coal, a mountain full of it! "Philip in luck," we are told, "had become suddenly a person of consideration, whose speech was freighted with meaning, whose looks were all significant. The words of a proprietor of a rich coal-mine have a golden sound, and his common sayings are repeated as if they were solid wisdom." Triumphant, Philip goes back to Ruth, and they are married, and the Gilded Age is justified in its children.

Am I wrong in suggesting that this is the true folk-Odyssey of our civilization? It is the pattern, one might almost say, of all the stories of modern America; and what distinguishes it from other national epopees is

the fact that all its idealism runs into the channel of money-making. Mr. Lowes Dickinson once commented on the truly religious character of American business. "The Gilded Age" enables us to verify that observation at the source; for all the phenomena of religion figure in Philip's search for the coal-mine. He lives in the "faith" of discovering it; he sees himself as another "Adam," as a "hermit" consecrated to that cause; he thinks of money as the treasure you long for in your youth when the world is fresh to you; he invokes Providence to help him to find it; he speaks of himself, in his ardent longing for it, as a "visionary"; he speaks of "fighting his battle alone," of "another fight with fate." This is not mere zeal, one observes, not the mere zeal of the mere votary; it is, quite specifically, the religious zeal of the religious votary. And as Philip Sterling is to himself in the process, so he is to others in the event: "The words of a proprietor of a rich coal-mine have a golden sound, and his common sayings are repeated as if they were solid wisdom." The hero, in other words, has become the prophet.

We can see now that, during the Gilded Age at least, wealth meant to Americans something else than mere material possession, and the pursuit of it nothing less than a sacred duty. One might note, in corroboration of this, an interesting passage from William Roscoe Thayer's "Life and Letters of John Hay":

> That you have property is proof of industry and foresight on your part or your father's; that you have nothing, is a judgment on your laziness and vices, or on your improvidence. The world is a moral world, which it would not be if virtue and vice received the same rewards. This summary, though confessedly crude, may help, if it be not pushed too close, to define John Hay's position. The property you own—be it a tiny cottage or a palace—means so much more than the tangible object! With it are bound up whatever in historic times has stood for Civilization. So an attack on Property becomes an attack on Civilization.

Here, surely, we have one of those supremely characteristic utterances that convey the note of whole societies. That industry and foresight are the cardinal virtues, that virtue and vice are to be distinguished not by any intrinsic spiritual standard but by their comparative results in material wealth, that the institution of private property is "bound up" with "whatever in historic times has stood for Civilization," barring, of course, the teachings of Jesus and Buddha and Francis of Assisi, and most of the art, thought and literature of the world, is a doctrine that can hardly seem other than eccentric to any one with a sense of the history of the human spirit. Yet it was the social creed of John Hay, and John Hay was not even a business man; he was a poet and a man of letters. When Tolstoy said that "property is not a law of nature, the will of God, or a historical necessity, but rather a superstition," he was expressing, in a somewhat extreme form, the general view of thinkers and poets and even of economists during these latter years, a view the imaginative mind can hardly do other than hold. It is very significant, therefore, to find American men of letters opposing, by this insistence upon the supremacy of material values, what must have been their own normal personal instinct as well as the whole tendency of modern liberal culture—for John Hay was far from unique; even Walt Whitman said: "Democracy looks with suspicious, ill-satisfied eye upon the very poor and on those out of business; she asks for men and women with occupations, well-off, owners of houses and acres, and with cash in the bank." Industry and foresight, devoted to the pursuit of wealth—here one has at once the end and the means of the simple, universal morality of the Gilded Age. And he alone was justified, to him alone everything was forgiven, who succeeded. "The following dialogue," wrote Dickens, in his "American Notes," "I have held a hundred times: 'Is it not a very

disgraceful circumstance that such a man as So-and-so should be acquiring a large property by the most infamous and odious means, and notwithstanding all the crimes of which he has been guilty, should be tolerated and abetted by your citizens? He is a public nuisance, is he not?' 'Yes, sir.' 'A convicted liar?' 'Yes, sir.' 'He has been kicked, and cuffed, and caned?' 'Yes, sir.' 'And he is utterly dishonorable, debased and profligate?' 'Yes, sir.' 'In the name of wonder, then, what is his merit?' 'Well, sir, he is a smart man.'" Smartness was indeed, for the Gilded Age, the divine principle that moved the sun and the other stars.

We cannot understand this mood, this creed, this morality unless we realize that the business men of the generation after the Civil War were, essentially, still pioneers and that all their habits of thought were the fruits of the exigencies of pioneering. The whole country was, in fact, engaged in a vast crusade that required an absolute homogeneity of feeling: almost every American family had some sort of stake in the West and acquiesced naturally, therefore, in that worship of success, that instinctive belief that there was something sacred in the pursuit of wealth without which the pioneers themselves could hardly have survived. Without the chance of an indeterminate financial reward, they would never have left their homes in the East or in Europe, without it they could never, under the immensely difficult conditions they encountered, have transformed, as they so often did, the spirit of adventure into the spirit of perseverance. What kept them up if it was not the hope, hardly of a competence, but of great wealth? Faith in the possibility of a lucky strike, the fact that immeasurable riches lay before some of them at least, that the mountains *were* full of gold and the lands of oil, that great cities were certainly destined to rise up some day in this wilderness, that these fertile territories, these great rivers, these rich forests lay there

brimming over with fortune for a race to come—that vision was ever in their minds. And since through private enterprise alone could that consummation ever come—for the group-spirit of the colonist had not been bred in the American nature—private enterprise became for the pioneer a sort of obligation to the society of the future; some instinct told him, to the steady welfare of his self-respect, that in serving himself well he was also serving America. To the pioneer, in short, private and public interests were identical and the worship of success was actually a social cult.

It was a crusade, I say, and it required an absolute homogeneity of feeling. We were a simple, homogeneous folk before the Civil War and the practical effect of pioneering and the business régime was to keep us so, to prevent any of that differentiation, that evolution of the homogeneous into the heterogeneous which, since Herbert Spencer stated it, has been generally conceived as the note of true human progress. The effect of business upon the individual has never been better described than in these words of Charles Francis Adams: "I have known, and known tolerably well, a good many 'successful' men—'big' financially—men famous during the last half-century; and a less interesting crowd I do not care to encounter. Not one that I have ever known would I care to meet again, either in this world or the next; nor is one of them associated in my mind with the idea of humor, thought or refinement. A set of mere money-getters and traders, they were essentially unattractive and uninteresting." Why this is so Mr. Herbert Croly has explained in "The Promise of American Life": "A man's individuality is as much compromised by success under the conditions imposed by such a system as it is by failure. His actual occupation may tend to make his individuality real and fruitful; but the quality of the work is determined by a merely acquisitive motive, and the man himself thereby usually

debarred from obtaining any edifying personal independence or any peculiar personal distinction. Different as American business men are one from another in temperament, circumstances and habits, they have a way of becoming fundamentally very much alike. Their individualities are forced into a common mold, because the ultimate measure of the value of their work is the same, and is nothing but its results in cash." Such is the result of the business process, and the success of the process required, during the epoch of industrial pioneering, a virtually automatic sacrifice of almost everything that makes individuality significant. "You no longer count" is the motto a French novelist has drawn from the European war: he means that, in order to attain the collective goal, the individual must necessarily submerge himself in the collective mind, that the mental uniform is no less indispensable than the physical. It was so in America, in the Gilded Age. The mere assertion of individuality was a menace to the integrity of what is called the herd: how much more so that extreme form of individuality, the creative spirit, whose whole tendency is sceptical, critical, realistic, disruptive! "It is no wonder, consequently," as Mr. Croly says, "that the pioneer democracy viewed with distrust and aversion the man with a special vocation and high standards of achievement." In fact, one was required not merely to forgo one's individual tastes and beliefs and ideas but positively to cry up the beliefs and tastes of the herd.

For it was not enough for the pioneers to suppress those influences that were hostile to their immediate efficiency: they were obliged also to romanticize their situation. Solitary as they were, or at best united in feeble groups against overwhelming odds, how could they have carried out their task if they had not been blinded to the difficulties, the hideousness of it? The myth of "manifest destiny," the America Myth, as one

might call it, what was it but an immense rose-colored veil the pioneers threw over the continent in order that it might be developed? Never were there such illusionists: they were like men in a chloroform dream, and it was happily so, for that chloroform was indeed an anæsthetic. Without the feeling that they were the children of destiny, without the social dream that some vast boon to humanity hung upon their enterprise, without the personal dream of immeasurable success for themselves, who would ever have endured such voluntary hardships? One recalls poor John Clemens, Mark Twain's father, absorbed in a perpetual motion machine that was to save mankind, no doubt, and bring its inventor millions. One recalls that vision of the "Tennessee land" that buoyed up the spirit of Squire Hawkins, even while it brought him wretchedness and death. As for Colonel Sellers, who was so intoxicated with dreams of fortune that he had lost all sense of the distinction between reality and illusion, he is indeed the archtypical American of the pioneering epoch. One remembers him in his miserable shanty in the Tennessee wilds, his wife worn to the bone, his children half naked and half starved, the carpetless floor, the pictureless walls, the crazy clock, the battered stove. To Colonel Sellers that establishment is a feudal castle, his wife is a châteleine, his children the baron's cubs, and when he lights the candle and places it behind the isinglass of the broken stove, is it not to him, indeed and in truth, the hospitable blaze upon the hearth of the great hall? To such a degree has the promoter's instinct, the "wish" of the advertiser, taken possession of his brain that he already sees in the barren stretch of land about him the city which is destined some day to rise up there. The vision of the material opportunities among which he lives has supplanted his reason and his five senses and obliterated in his eyes the whole aspect of reality. The pioneers, in fact, had not only to submit to these

illusions but to propagate them. A story Mark Twain used to tell, the story of Jim Gillis and the California plums, is emblematic of this. Jim Gillis, the original of Bret Harte's "Truthful James," was a miner to whose solitary cabin in the Tuolumne hills Mark Twain and his friends used to resort. One day an old squaw came along selling some green plums. One of the men carelessly remarked that while these plums, "California plums," might be all right he had never heard of any one eating them. "There was no escape after that," says Mr. Paine; "Jim had to buy some of those plums, whose acid was of the hair-lifting, aqua-fortis variety, and all the rest of the day he stewed them, adding sugar, trying to make them palatable, tasting them now and then, boasting meanwhile of their nectar-like deliciousness. He gave the others a taste by and by—a withering, corroding sup—and they derided him and rode him down. But Jim never weakened. He ate that fearful brew, and though for days his mouth was like fire he still referred to the luscious, health-giving joys of the 'California' plums." How much of the romanticism of the pioneers there is in that story! It was the same over-determination that led them to call their settlements by such names as Eden, like that wretched swamp-hamlet in "Martin Chuzzlewit," that made them inveigle prospectors and settlers with utterly mendacious pictures of their future, that made it obligatory upon every one to "boost, not knock," a slogan still of absolute authority in certain parts of the West.

Behind this tendency the nation was united as a solid block: it would not tolerate anything that attacked the ideal of success, that made the country seem unattractive or the future uncertain. Every sort of criticism, in fact, was regarded as *lèse-majesté* to the folk-spirit of America, and no traveler from abroad, however fair-minded, could tell the truth about us without jeopardizing his life, liberty and reputation. Who does not

remember the story of Dickens's connection with America, the still more notable story of the good Captain Basil Hall who, simply because he mentioned in print some of the less attractive traits of pioneer life, was publicly accused of being an agent of the British government on a special mission to blacken and defame this country? Merely to describe facts as they were was regarded as a sort of treachery among a people who, having next to no intellectual interest in the truth, had, on the other hand, a strong emotional interest in the perversion of it. An American who went abroad and stayed, without an official excuse, more than a reasonable time, was regarded as a turncoat and a deserter; if he remained at home he was obliged to accept the uniform on pain of being called a crank and of actually, by the psychological law that operates in these cases, becoming one. There is no type in our social history more significant than that ubiquitous figure, the "village atheist." One recalls Judge Driscoll in "Pudd'nhead Wilson," the president of the Free-Thinkers' Society of which Pudd'nhead was the only other member. "Judge Driscoll," says Mark Twain, "could be a free-thinker and still hold his place in society, because he was the person of most consequence in the community, and therefore could venture to go his own way and follow out his own notions." No respect for independence and individuality, in short, entitled a man to regulate his own views on life; quite on the contrary, that was the privilege solely of those who, having proved themselves superlatively "smart," were able to take it, as it were, by force. If you could out-pioneer the pioneers, you could wrest the possession of your own mind: by that time, in any case, it was usually so soured and warped and embittered as to have become safely impotent.

As we can see now, a vast unconscious conspiracy actuated all America against the creative spirit. In an age when every sensitive mind in England was in full

revolt against the blind, mechanical, devastating forces of a "progress" that promised nothing but the ultimate collapse of civilization; when all Europe was alive with prophets, aristocratic prophets, proletarian prophets, religious and philosophical and humanitarian and economic and artistic prophets, crying out, in the name of the human spirit, against the obscene advance of capitalistic industrialism; in an age glorified by nothing but the beautiful anger of the Tolstoys and the Marxes, the Nietzsches and the Renans, the Ruskins and the Morrises—in that age America, innocent, ignorant, profoundly untroubled, slept the righteous sleep of its own manifest and peculiar destiny. We were, in fact, in our provincial isolation, in just the state of the Scandinavian countries during the European wars of 1866-1870, as George Brandes describes it in his autobiography: "While the intellectual life languished, as a plant droops in a close, confined place, the people were self-satisfied. They rested on their laurels and fell into a doze. And while they dozed they had dreams. The cultivated, and especially the half-cultivated, public in Denmark and Norway dreamed that they were the salt of Europe. They dreamed that by their idealism they would regenerate the foreign nations. They dreamed that they were the free, mighty North, which would lead the cause of the peoples to victory—and they woke up unfree, impotent, ignorant."

Yes, even New England, the old home of so many brave and virile causes, even New England, which had cared so much for the freedom of the individual, had ceased to afford any stimulus or any asylum for the human spirit. New England had been literally emasculated by the Civil War, or rather by the exodus of young men westward which was more or less synchronous with the war. The continent had been opened up, the rural population of the East had been uprooted, had been set in motion, had formed habits of wander-

ing. The war, like a fever, had as it were stimulated the circulation of the race, and we might say that by a natural attraction the blood of the head, which New England had been, had flowed into those remote members, the Western territories.

In "Roughing It," Mark Twain has pictured the population of the gold-fields. "It was a driving, vigorous, restless population in those days," he says. "It was an assemblage of two hundred thousand *young* men —not simpering, dainty, kid-glove weaklings, but stalwart, muscular, dauntless young braves, brimful of push and energy, and royally endowed with every attribute that goes to make up a peerless and magnificent manhood—the very pick and choice of the world's glorious ones. No women, no children, no gray and stooping veterans—none but erect, bright-eyed, quick-moving, strong-handed young giants. . . . It was a splendid population, for all the slow, sleepy, sluggish-brained sloths stayed at home—you never find that sort of people among pioneers." Those gold-fields of the West! One might almost imagine that Nature itself was awake and conscious, and not only awake but shrewd and calculating, to have placed such a magnet there at the farthest edge of the continent in order to captivate the highest imaginations, in order to draw, swiftly, fatefully, over that vast, forbidding intervening space, a population hardy enough, inventive enough, poetic enough if not to conquer and subdue at least to cover it and stake the claims of the future. But what was the result? One is often told by New Englanders who were children in the years just after the war how the young men left the towns and villages never to return. And has not a whole school of story-writers and, more recently, of poets, familiarized us with the life of this New England countryside during the generation that followed—those villages full of old maids and a few tattered remnants of the male sex, the less vigorous, the less intelligent, a

population only half sane owing to solitude and the decay of social interests? What a civilization they picture, those novels and those poems!—a civilization riddled with neurasthenia, madness and mental death. Christian Science was as characteristic an outgrowth of this generation as abolition and perfectionism, philosophy and poetry, all those manifestations of a surplus of psychic energy, had been of the generation before. New England, in short, and with New England the whole spiritual life of the nation, had passed into the condition of a neurotic anæmia in which it has remained so largely to this day.

This explains the notorious petrifaction of Boston, that petrifaction of its higher levels which was illustrated in so tragi-comic a way by the unhappy episode of Mark Twain's Whittier Birthday speech. It was not the fault of those gently charming men, Emerson and Longfellow and Dr. Holmes, that he was made to feel, in his own phrase, "like a barkeeper in heaven." They had no wish to be, or to appear, like graven idols; it was the subsidence of the flood of life beneath them that had left them high and dry as the ark on Ararat. They continued, survivals as they were of a happier age when a whole outlying population had in a measure shared their creative impulses, to nod and smile, to think and dream, just as if nothing had happened. They were not offended by Mark Twain's unlucky wit: Boston was offended, Boston which, no longer open to the winds of impulse and desire, cherished these men as the symbols of an extinct cause that had grown all the more sacrosanct in their eyes the less they participated in it. For the real forces of Boston society had gone the way of all flesh. The Brahmins and the sons of the Brahmins had not followed bodily in the path of the pioneers, but they had followed them, discreetly, in spirit; they saved their faces by remaining, like Charles Francis Adams, "otherwise-minded," but they bought up land in Kan-

sas City just the same. In a word, the last stronghold of the stiff-necked and free-minded masculine individualism of the American past had capitulated to the golden eagle: literature, culture, the conservation of the ideal had passed into the hands of women. Ah, it was not women only, not the sort of women who had so often tended the bright light of literature in France! It was the sad, ubiquitous spinster, left behind with her own desiccated soul by the stampede of the young men westward. New England had retained its cultural hegemony by default, and the New England spinster, with her restricted experience, her complicated repressions, and all her glacial taboos of good form, had become the pacemaker in the arts.

One cannot but see in Mr. Howells the predestined figurehead of this new régime. It was the sign of the decay of artistic vitality in New England that the old literary Brahmins were obliged to summon a Westerner to carry on their apostolic succession, for Mr. Howells, the first alien editor of *The Atlantic Monthly,* was consecrated to the high priesthood by an all but literal laying on of hands; and certainly Mr. Howells, already intimidated by the prestige of Boston, was a singularly appropriate heir. He has told us in his autobiography how, having as a young reporter in Ohio stumbled upon a particularly sordid tragedy, he resolved ever after to avert his eyes from the darker side of life—an incident that throws rather a glaring light upon what later became his prime dogma, that "the more smiling aspects of life are the more American": the dogma, as we see, was merely a rationalization of his own unconscious desire neither to see in America nor to say about America anything that Americans in general did not wish to have seen or said. His confessed aim was to reveal the charm of the commonplace, an essentially passive and feminine conception of his art; and while his superficial realism gave him the sanction of modernity, it dis-

pensed him at the same time from any of those drastic imaginative reconstructions of life and society that are of the essence of all masculine fiction. In short, he had attained a thoroughly denatured point of view and one nicely adapted to an age that would not tolerate any assault upon the established fact: meanwhile, the eminence of his position and his truly beautiful and distinguished talent made him what Mark Twain called "the critical Court of Last Resort in this country, from whose decision there is no appeal." The spokesman, the mild and submissive dictator of an age in which women wrote half the books and formed the greater part of the reading public, he diffused far and wide the notion of the artist's rôle through which he had found his own salvation, a notion, that is to say, which accepted implicitly the religious, moral and social taboos of the time.

I have said that, during this epoch, a vast unconscious conspiracy actuated all America against the creative life. For is it not plain now that the cultural domination of this emasculated New England simply played into the hands of the business régime? The taboos of the one supported, in effect, the taboos of the other: the public opinion of both sexes and of all classes, East and West alike, formed a closed ring as it were against any manifestation of the vital, restless, critical, disruptive spirit of artistic individuality. It was this, and not the fact, or the illusion, that America was a "young" country, that impelled Henry James and Whistler, and virtually every other American who possessed a vital sense of the artistic vocation, to seek what necessarily became an exotic development in Europe. It was this that drove Walt Whitman into his lair at Camden, where he lived at bay during the rest of his life, carrying on a perpetual guerrilla warfare against the whole literary confraternity of the age. It was this, we may assume, that led John Hay to publish "The Breadwinners" anony-

mously, and Henry Adams his novel, "Democracy." With the corruption, the vulgarity, the vapidity of American life these men were completely disillusioned, but motives of self-preservation, motives that would certainly not have operated in men of a corresponding type before the Civil War, restrained them from impairing, by strong assertions of individual judgment, "the consistency of feeling upon which the pioneers rightly placed such a high value." The tradition of literary independence had never been strong in America; that the artist and the thinker are types whose integrity is vital to society and who are under a categorical imperative to pursue their vocation frankly and disinterestedly was an idea that had entered scarcely a dozen American minds; our authors generally had accepted the complacent dictum of William Cullen Bryant that literature is "a good staff but a bad crutch," not a vocation, in short, but an avocation. A few desperate minds justified themselves by representing the artist as a sort of glorified Methodist minister and reacted so far from the prevailing materialism as to say that art was under a divine sanction: we can see from the letters of George Inness and Sidney Lanier how these poor men, these admirable and sincere men, allowed themselves to be devoured by theory. In general, however, the new dispensation bred a race of writers who accommodated themselves instinctively to the exigencies of an age that required a rigid conformity in spirit, while maintaining, as a sop to Cerberus, a highly artistic tradition in form.

Thus, save for the voice of the machine, the whole nation was quiescent: no specter intruded upon the jolly family party of prosperous America; there was no one to gainsay its blind and innocent longing for success, for prestige, for power. Mr. Meredith Nicholson lately wrote a glowing eulogy on the idyllic life of the Valley of Democracy. "It is in keeping with the cheery con-

tentment of the West," he said, "that it believes that it has 'at home' or can summon to its R. F. D. box everything essential to human happiness." Why, he added, the West even has poets, admirable poets, representative poets; and among these poets he mentioned the author of the "Spoon River Anthology." There we have a belated but none the less perfect illustration of the romantic dualism of the Gilded Age; for in the very fact of becoming a cultural possession of the Middle West, the "Spoon River Anthology" completely upsets Mr. Nicholson's glowing picture of its life. Mr. Nicholson does not see this; to him, as to Mr. Howells, "the more smiling aspects of life are the more American," but that is because he too has averted his eyes from all the other aspects. There, I say, in that false syllogism of Mr. Nicholson's, we have a perfect illustration of the romantic dualism of the Gilded Age and of the part literature was obliged to play in it. Essentially, America was not happy; it was a dark jumble of decayed faiths, of unconfessed class distinctions, of repressed desires, of inarticulate misery—read "The Story of a Country Town" and "A Son of the Middle Border" and "Ethan Frome"; it was a nation like other nations, and one that had no folk-music, no folk-art, no folk-poetry, or next to none, to express it, to console it; but to have said so would have been to "hurt business"! It was a horde-life, a herd-life, an epoch without sun or stars, the twilight of a human spirit that had nothing upon which to feed but the living waters of Camden and the dried manna of Concord: for the jolly family party was open to very few and those, moreover, who, except for their intense family affections and a certain hectic joy of action that left them old and worn at fifty-five, had forgone the best things life has to offer. But was it not for the welfare of all that they so diligently promulgated the myth of America's "manifest destiny"? Perhaps. Perhaps, since the prodigious task

of pioneering had to be carried through; perhaps also because, after the disillusionments of the present epoch, that myth will prove to have a certain beautiful residuum of truth.

## CHAPTER IV

### IN THE CRUCIBLE

"The American proposes to realize his individuality freely and fully, but so long as he is master of his person and free to choose, he considers himself satisfied, willingly consenting that some other person, better qualified or more competent, should choose in his place. From the instant when he can do what he will, he easily wills what he is asked to will."

GUSTAVE RODRIGUES: *The People of Action.*

RECOLLECT, now, the mood in which Mark Twain went West to the gold-fields of Nevada—the mood of a "regular fellow." Was it not one that exposed him, in a peculiar sense, to the contagion of the Gilded Age? For weeks after he reached Carson City he played about in the woods, "too full of the enjoyment of camp life" to build the fence about a timber claim which he and a comrade had located. He was out for a good time, oblivious of everything else and with all the unconsciousness of a child. A moralist would have said that the devil had already marked him out for destruction.

Recollect how, on the river, Mark Twain had impressed his confrères of the wheel: "the pilots regarded him as a great reader—a student of history, travels, literature and the sciences—a young man whom it was an education as well as an entertainment to know." Now, in Nevada, says Mr. Paine, "his hearers generally regarded him as an easy-going, indolent good fellow with a love of humor—with talent, perhaps—but as one not likely ever to set the world afire." Does not that suggest a certain disintegration of the spirit? We infer

this, in any case, from the sudden change in his personal appearance, always a sort of barometric symptom in Mark Twain's life. "Lately a river sovereign and dandy —in fancy percales and patent leathers—in white duck and striped shirts—he had become the roughest of rough-clad miners, in rusty slouch hat, flannel shirts, coarse trousers, slopping half in and half out of the heavy cowskin boots." Merely, you imagine, the natural change in dress that any gold-seeker would have made? No: "he went even further than others and became a sort of paragon of disarray." An unmistakable surrender of the pride and consciousness of his individuality! And whoever doubts the significance of this may well compare the tone of his utterances as a pilot with such characteristic notes of his Nevada life as this: "If I were not naturally a lazy, idle, good-for-nothing vagabond I could make [journalism] pay me $20,000 a year. But I don't suppose I shall ever be any account." The reversion to that earlier frame of mind, in short, had not made this man, who was approaching thirty, a boy again: it made him behave like a boy, it made him, half the time, feel like a boy, but it revealed in him, nevertheless, the indisputable signs of a certain dereliction from some path of development his nature had commanded him to follow. The artist in him had lost its guiding-line; he was "broken down" again, just as he had been after his father's death; his spirit had become plastic once more. He was ready, in a word, to take the stamp of his new environment.

Now, whatever was true of America during the Gilded Age was doubly true of Nevada, where, as Mr. Paine says, "all human beings, regardless of previous affiliations and convictions, were flung into the common fusing-pot and recast into the general mold of pioneer." Life in the gold-fields was, in fact, an infinite intensification of pioneering, it was a sort of furnace in which all the elements of human nature were transmuted into

a single white flame, an incandescence of the passion of avarice. If we are to accept Mark Twain's description in "Roughing It" of the "flush times" in Virginia City, we can see that the spirit of the artist had about as good a chance of survival and development there as a butterfly in a blazing chimney: "Virginia had grown to be the 'livest' town, for its age and population, that America had ever produced. The side-walks swarmed with people. The streets themselves were just as crowded with quartz-wagons, freight-teams, and other vehicles. . . . Joy sat on every countenance, and there was a glad, almost fierce, intensity in every eye that told of the money-getting schemes that were seething in every brain and the high hope that held sway in every heart. Money was as plenty as dust. . . . There were military companies, fire companies, brass bands, banks, hotels, theaters, 'hurdy-gurdy houses,' wide-open gambling palaces, political pow-wows, civic processions, street-fights, murders, inquests, riots, a whiskey mill every fifteen steps, a dozen breweries, and half a dozen jails and station-houses in full operation, and some talk of building a church. The 'flush times' were in magnificent flower! . . . The great 'Comstock lode' stretched its opulent length straight through the town from North to South, and every mine on it was in diligent process of development."

This was the spirit of Mark Twain's new environment, a spirit inflexibly opposed, as we can see, to the development of individuality. Had Mark Twain been free, it might have been a matter of indifference to him; he might have gone his own way and amused himself with the astonishing spectacle of the gold-fields and then taken himself off again. But Mark Twain was not free; he was, on the contrary, bound in such a way that, far from being able to stand aloof from his environment, he had to make terms with it. For what obligations had he not incurred! To become such a conventional citizen

as his father would have approved of, to make money and restore the fallen fortunes of his family—that old pledge was fixed in the back of his mind, where it had been confirmed by his failure to discover and assert any independent principle of his own. Furthermore, he now had his own financial record to live up to. It was the lucrativeness and prestige of the pilot's career that had originally enabled him to adopt it, and we know what pride he had had in his "great triumph," in being a somebody at last: his brother Orion had considered it a "disgrace" to descend to the trade of printing: they were gentleman's sons, these Clemenses! He had had, in short, a chance to exercise and educate his creative instinct while at the same time doing what was expected of him. And now, when he had lost his guiding-line, more was expected of him than ever! His salary, at twenty-three, on the river, had been $250 a month, a vastly greater income certainly than his father had ever earned: at once and of course, we are told, he had become, owing to this fact, the head of the Clemens family. "His brother Orion was ten years older," says Mr. Paine, "but he had not the gift of success. By common consent, the young brother assumed permanently the position of family counselor and financier." These circumstances, I say, compelled Mark Twain to make terms with public opinion. He could not fall too far behind the financial pace his piloting life had set for him, he was bound to recover the prestige that had been his and to shine once more as a conspicuous and important personage, he had to "make good" again, quickly and spectacularly: that was a duty which had also become a craving. How strongly he felt it we can see from one of his Nevada letters in which he declares earnestly that he will never look upon his mother's face again, or his sister's, or get married, or revisit the "Banner State," until he is a rich man.

What chance was there now for the artist in Mark

Twain to find itself? A unique opportunity had led him for four years into the channel of inner development through a special vocation; but it was only the indispensability of the pilot to the Mississippi river folk that had obliged them to give him such lordly freedom. No special vocation was indispensable in Nevada; consequently, no special vocation was tolerated. There, the pioneer law of which Mr. Croly speaks held absolute sway: "the man who persisted in one job interfered with the rough good-fellowship which naturally arises among a group of men who submit good-naturedly and uncritically to current standards: his higher standards and peculiar ways constituted an implied criticism upon the easy methods of his neighbors" and he himself impaired "the consistency of feeling upon which the pioneers rightly placed such a high value." Even if Mark Twain had been fully aware of the demands of his creative instinct, therefore—and he was anything but fully aware of them—he could not have fulfilled them now and at the same time fulfilled his craving for wealth and prestige. Accordingly, he was obliged to acquiesce in the repression of his individuality. His frank freedom of sentiment, his love of reading, his constant desire for privacy—all those qualities that revealed his natural creative instinct—were, from the point of view of his comrades, just so many "pretensions": precisely in so far as they were "different" or "superior," they had to be taken down. The frequency and the force of these manifestations, and the tenacity with which, up to a certain point, he persisted in indulging in them, made him, as we know, a general butt. Many and "cruel," to use his own word, were the tricks his comrades played on him. Knowing his highly organized nervous system, they devised the most complicated methods of torturing him. There was the incident of the false Meerschaum pipe, which cut him to the quick, this man who had been betrayed into uttering words of heartfelt grati-

tude; there were the diabolical monkey-tricks of Steve Gillis who, with his "fiendish tendency to mischief," was always finding means to prevent him from reading; there was the famous hold-up on the Divide on the night of his lecture: "Mark didn't see it our way," said one of the perpetrators of this last practical joke. "He was mad clear through." In short, every revelation of his individuality was mercilessly ridiculed, and Mark Twain was reminded a dozen times a day that his natural instincts and desires and tendencies were incompatible with pioneer life and fatal to the chances of any man who was pledged to succeed in it. That is why, though he always retaliated at first, he always yielded in the end.

Meanwhile, with his creative instinct repressed, his acquisitive instinct, the race-instinct that rose as the personal instinct fell, was stimulated to the highest degree. Money was so "easy" in Nevada that one could hardly think of anything else. "I met three friends one afternoon," he says in "Roughing It," "who said they had been buying 'Overman' stock at auction at eight dollars a foot. One said if I would come up to his office he would give me fifteen feet; another said he would add fifteen; the third said he would do the same. But I was going after an inquest and could not stop. A few weeks afterward they sold all their 'Overman' at six hundred dollars a foot and generously came around to tell me about it—and also to urge me to accept of the next forty-five feet of it that people tried to force on me. These are actual facts, and I could make the list a long one and still confine myself strictly to the truth. Many a time friends gave me as much as twenty-five feet of stock that was selling at twenty-five dollars a foot; and they thought no more of it than they would of offering a guest a cigar. These were 'flush times' indeed!" In short, in order to stand in with pioneer society, it was not enough to repress everything in you

that made you "different"; you had to form extravagant habits, you had to treat money like water, and you had to make it! Mark Twain was not merely obliged to check his creative instinct; he was obliged to do his level best to become a millionaire.

It is a significant fact, under these circumstances, that Mark Twain failed as a miner. He had good luck, now and then, enough to make wealth a tantalizing possibility. He describes, though we are told with exaggeration, how he was once "a millionaire for ten days." But he failed as a miner precisely because he was unable to bring to his new work any of those qualities that had made him so successful as a pilot. Concentration, perseverance, above all, judgment—these were the qualities that former career had given birth to. The craftsman's life had instantly matured him; the life of sheer exploitation, in spite of his sense of duty, in spite of the incentives of his environment, in spite of the prospects of wealth and prestige it offered him, could not fuse his spirit at all. It only made him frantic and lax by turns. He went off prospecting, and with what result? "One week of this satisfied me," he said. "I resigned." Then he flung himself into quartz-mining. "The letters which went from the Aurora miner to Orion," we are told, "are humanly documentary. They are likely to be staccato in their movement; they show nervous haste in their composition, eagerness, and suppressed excitement; they are not always coherent; they are seldom humorous, except in a savage way; they are often profane; they are likely to be violent. Even the handwriting has a terse look; the flourish of youth has gone out of it. Altogether they reveal the tense anxiety of the gambling mania." Then the pendulum swings to the other extreme: he is utterly disgusted and has but one wish, to give up everything and go away. "If Sam had got that pocket," said one of his comrades, of his last exploit, "he would have remained a pocket-miner to the

end of his days''; but he would have got it if he had been able to bring to the situation any of the qualities he would have brought to a critical situation on the Mississippi. It is quite plain that he failed simply because he did not care enough about money, merely as money, to succeed. His real self, the artist, in short, could not develop, and yet, repressed as it was, it prevented him from becoming whole-heartedly anything else. We shall see this exhibited throughout the whole of Mark Twain's business life.

So here was Mark Twain face to face with a dilemma. His unconscious desire was to be an artist, but this implied an assertion of individuality that was a sin in the eyes of his mother and a shame in the eyes of society. On the other hand, society and his mother wanted him to be a business man, and for this he could not summon up the necessary powers in himself. The eternal dilemma of every American writer! It was the dilemma which, as we shall see in the end, Mark Twain solved by becoming a humorist.

Only a few hints of the dumb conflict that was passing in Mark Twain's soul rise to the surface of Mr. Paine's pages. We are told scarcely more than that he was extremely moody. ''He was the life of the camp,'' one of his comrades recalled, ''but sometimes there would come a reaction and he would hardly speak for a day or two.'' Constantly we find him going off ''alone into the wilderness to find his balance and to get away entirely from humankind.'' There were other times when he ''talked little or not at all, but sat in one corner and wrote, wholly oblivious of his surroundings''—wrote letters, his companions thought, for they would hardly have left him in peace had they imagined he was writing anything else. All this time, plainly, his creative instinct was endeavoring to establish itself, with what mixed motives, however, we can see from the fact that he signed his first printed pieces with the pen-name

"Josh." "He did not care to sign his own name," says Mr. Paine. "He was a miner who was soon to be a magnate; he had no desire to be known as a camp-scribbler." How much meaning there is in that sentence!—all the contempt and hostility of the pioneers for literature, all Mark Twain's fear of public opinion, all the force of his own counter-impulse to succeed on pioneer terms, to stand in with society, to suppress in himself a desire that was so unpopular. We can see these mixed motives in the strange, realistic bravado with which he said to a man who wanted to start a literary magazine in Virginia City: "You would succeed if any one could, but start a flower-garden on the desert of Sahara, set up hoisting-works on Mount Vesuvius for mining sulphur, start a literary paper in Virginia City; hell!"

Nevertheless, there was in Virginia City a paper with some literary pretensions called the *Enterprise,* which was edited and written by a group of men famous all over the West for their wit and talent. It was to the *Enterprise* that Mark Twain had been sending his writings, and at last he was offered a position on the staff. This position he presently accepted. It is significant, however, that he did so with profound reluctance.

Assuming, as we are obliged to assume, that Mark Twain was a born writer, it is natural to suppose that he would have welcomed any opportunity to exchange his uncongenial and futile life as a miner for a life of literary activities and associations. He would naturally have gravitated toward such people as the *Enterprise* group: that he did so is proved by his constantly courting them as a contributor. But committing himself by accepting their offer of a position was quite a different matter, in spite of the fact that they, as happy-go-lucky journalists, were in perfectly good standing with the rest of the pioneers. "Everybody had money; everybody wanted to laugh and have a good time," says Mr. Paine.

"The *Enterprise,* 'Comstock to the backbone,' did what it could to help things along." Certainly Mark Twain could not have thought he would be losing caste by connecting himself with an institution like that! There, in short, was his chance at last, as one might suppose; and how did he receive it? "In 'Roughing It,'" says Mr. Paine, "we are led to believe that the author regarded this as a gift from heaven and accepted it straightway. As a matter of fact, he fasted and prayed a good while over the 'call,'" and it was only when "the money situation" had become truly "desperate" and he had lost all hope of making his way as a miner that he accepted it. Before binding himself he set off at midnight, alone and on foot, for a seventy-mile walk through uninhabited country: "He had gone into the wilderness," says Mr. Paine, "to fight his battle alone"; and we are told that he came out again eight days later with his mind still undecided. How different that all is from the mood in which he had entered upon his piloting career! There had been no hesitation then! He had walked forward with clear eye and sure foot like a man registering an inevitable choice of his whole soul. Now he has to battle with himself and the step he finally takes has, to my sense, the strangest air of a capitulation. He walked all the way from Aurora to Virginia City, a hundred and thirty miles, drifting into the *Enterprise* office worn and travel-stained, we are told, on a hot, dusty August day. "My starboard leg seems to be unshipped," he announced at the door. "I'd like about one hundred yards of line; I think I am falling to pieces." Then he added: "My name is Clemens, and I've come to write for the paper." It was, says Mr. Paine, "the master of the world's widest estate come to claim his kingdom." Am I mistaken, however, in feeling that there is something painful in that scene, something shamefaced, something that suggests not an acclamation but a surrender?

Mr. Paine, indeed, perceives that in joining the staff of the *Enterprise* Mark Twain was in some way transgressing his own desire. He attributes this, however, to another motive than the one that seems to me dominant. Clemens, he says, displayed "no desperate eagerness to break into literature, even under those urgent conditions. It meant the surrender of all hope in the mines, the confession of another failure." No doubt Mark Twain's masculine pride revolted against that; he had more or less committed himself to mining, he was turning his back besides on the line of activity his mother and his companions approved of; he was relinquishing the possibility of some sudden, dazzling stroke of fortune that might have bought his freedom once for all. In short, there were plenty of reasons dictated by his acquisitive instinct for making him reluctant to surrender the mining career in which he had proved himself so inept. But although his acquisitive instinct had been stimulated to excess, in his heart of hearts he was not a money-maker but an artist, and the artist in him would naturally, as I say, have acclaimed this opportunity. In order to understand his reluctance, therefore, we must consider not only the hopes he was giving up with his mining career but the character of that opportunity also. Somehow, in this new call, the creative instinct in Mark Twain not only failed to recognize its own but actually foresaw some element of danger. What, briefly, did the *Enterprise* mean for him? He had been sending in his compositions; he had been trying his hand, experimenting, we know, in different styles, and only his humor "took." He had written at last a burlesque report of a Fourth of July oration which opened with the words, "I was sired by the Great American Eagle and foaled by a continental dam," and it was this that had won the editor's heart and prompted him to offer Clemens the position. "That," said he, "is the sort of thing we want." Mark Twain knew this; he knew that,

although the policy of the *Enterprise* was one of "absolutely free speech," he would be expected to cultivate that one vein alone and that his own craving for wealth and prestige, the obligation to make money which would become all the more pressing if he relinquished the direct acquisitive path of the mining life, would prevent him from crossing the editor's will or from cultivating any other vein than that which promised him the greatest popularity. For him, therefore, the opportunity of the *Enterprise* meant an obligation to become virtually a professional humorist, and this alone. Had he wished to become a humorist, we are now in a position to see, he would not have displayed such reluctance in joining the *Enterprise,* and the fact that he displayed this reluctance shows us that in becoming a humorist he felt that in some way he was selling rather than fulfilling his own soul.

Why this was so we cannot consider at present: the time has not yet come to discuss the psychogenesis and the significance of Mark Twain's humor. But that it was so we have ample evidence. Mr. Cable tells how, to his amazement, once, when he and Clemens were giving a public reading together, the latter, whom he had supposed happy and satisfied with his triumphant success, turned to him on their way back to the hotel and said with a groan, "Oh, Cable, I am demeaning myself—I am allowing myself to be a mere buffoon. It's ghastly. I can't endure it any longer." And all the next day, Mr. Cable says, he sedulously applied himself, in spite of the immense applause that had greeted him, to choosing selections for his next reading which would be justified not only as humor but as literature and art. This is only one of many instances of Mark Twain's lifelong revolt against a rôle which he apparently felt had been thrust upon him. It is enough to corroborate all our intuitions regarding the reluctance with which he accepted it.

But there is plenty of other evidence to corroborate these intuitions. Mr. Paine tells us that henceforth, in his letters home, "the writer rarely speaks of his work at all, and is more inclined to tell of the mining shares he has accumulated," that there is "no mention of his new title"—the pen-name he had adopted—"and its success." He knew that his severe Calvinistic mother could hardly sympathize with his scribblings, worthy or unworthy, that she was much more concerned about the money he was making; he who had sworn never to come home again until he was a rich man was ashamed in his mother's eyes to have adopted a career that promised him success indeed, but a success incomparable with that of the mining magnate he had set out to be. Still, that success immediately proved to be considerable, and if he had felt any essential pride in his new work he would certainly have said something about it. What we actually find him writing is this: "I cannot overcome my repugnance to telling what I am doing or what I expect to do or propose to do." That he had no essential pride in this work, that it was not personal, that he did not think of it as a true expression of himself but rather as a commodity we can see from the motives with which he chose his pen-name: "His letters, copied and quoted all along the Coast, were unsigned," says Mr. Paine. "They were easily identified with one another, but not with a personality. He realized that to build a reputation it was necessary to fasten it to an individuality, a name. He gave the matter a good deal of thought. He did not consider the use of his own name; the *nom de plume* was the fashion of the time. He wanted something brief, crisp, definite, unforgettable. He tried over a good many combinations in his mind, but none seemed convincing," etc., etc. In short, he wanted a trade mark in order to sell what he instinctively regarded as his merchandise; and the fact that the pen-name was the fashion of the time—in

pioneer circles, especially, observe—simply argues that all the other writers in the West were in a similar case. The pen-name was a form of "protective coloration" for men who could not risk, in their own persons, the odium of the literary life, and it is an interesting coincidence that "Mark Twain," in the pilot's vocabulary, implied "safe water." We shall see later how very significant this coincidence was in Mark Twain's life: what we observe now is that he instinctively thought of his writing as something external to himself, as something of which he was proud only because it paid.

It is quite plain, then, that far from having found himself again, as he had once found himself on the Mississippi, Mark Twain had now gone astray. He had his ups and downs, his success, however prodigious, was intermittent; but whether he was up or whether he was down he was desperately ill-at-ease within: his letters and memoranda show all the evidence of a "bad conscience." Hear him in San Francisco: "We have been here only four months, yet we have changed our lodgings five times. We are very comfortably fixed where we are now and have no fault to find with the rooms or the people. . . . But I need change and must move again." Whatever else that incessant, senseless movement may mean, it is certainly not the sign of a man whose work absorbs him, whose nature is crystallizing along its proper lines. "Home again," he notes in his journal, after those weeks of respite in the Sandwich Islands. "No—not home again—in prison again, and all the wild sense of freedom gone. The city seems so cramped and so dreary with toil and care and business anxiety. God help me, I wish I were at sea again!" Work, writing, had become in his eyes identical with toil: "Clemens once declared he had been so blue at this period," says Mr. Paine, "that one morning he put a loaded pistol to his head, but found he lacked courage to pull the trigger." And observe, finally, what he writes to his mother

from New York as he is about to start on the *Quaker City* excursion which is to result in "The Innocents Abroad" and his great fame. There are two letters, written within the same week of June, 1867; the eagerness of his youth does not suffice to explain their agitation. In the first he says: "I am wild with impatience to move—move—*move!* . . . Curse the endless delays! They always kill me—they make me neglect every duty and then I have a conscience that tears me like a wild beast. I wish I never had to stop anywhere a month." The second is even more specific: "I am so worthless that it seems to me I never do anything or accomplish anything that lingers in my mind as a pleasant memory. My mind is stored full of unworthy conduct toward Orion and toward you all, and an accusing conscience gives me peace only in excitement and restless moving from place to place. . . . You observe that under a cheerful exterior I have got a spirit that is angry with me and gives me freely its contempt." The reason he assigns for this frame of mind is wholly unacceptable: far from being guilty of "unworthy conduct" toward his family, there is every evidence that he had been, as he remained, the most loyal and bountiful of sons and guardians. "Under a cheerful exterior I have got a spirit that is angry with me and gives me freely its contempt." Could he say more plainly that he has committed himself to a course of action which has, in some quite definite way, transgressed his principle of growth?

One further, final proof. In 1865 "The Jumping Frog" was published in New York, where, according to one of the California correspondents, it was "voted the best thing of the day." How did Clemens, who was still in the West, receive the news of his success? "The telegraph," says Mr. Paine, "did not carry such news in those days, and it took a good while for the echo of his victory to travel to the Coast. When at last a lagging word of it did arrive, it would seem to have brought

disappointment, rather than exaltation, to the author. Even Artemus Ward's opinion of the story had not increased Mark Twain's regard for it as literature. That it had struck the popular note meant, as he believed, failure for his more highly regarded work. In a letter written January 20, 1866, he says these things for himself: 'I do not know what to write; my life is so uneventful. I wish I was back there piloting up and down the river again. Verily, all is vanity and little worth—save piloting. To think that, after writing many an article a man might be excused for thinking tolerably good, those New York people should single out a villainous backwoods sketch to compliment me on!—"Jim Smiley and His Jumping Frog"—a squib which would never have been written but to please Artemus Ward.' " He had thought so little of that story indeed that he had not even offered it to *The Californian,* the magazine to which he was a staff contributor: "he did not," says Mr. Paine, "regard it highly as literary material." We can see in that letter the bitter prompting of his creative instinct, in rebellion against the course he has drifted into; we can see how his acquisitive instinct, on the other hand, forbids him to gainsay the success he has achieved. "I am in for it," he writes to his brother. "I must go on chasing [phantoms] until I marry, *then* I am done with literature and all other bosh—that is, literature wherewith to please the general public. I shall write to please myself then." Marriage, he says to himself, is going to liberate him, this poor, ingenuous being!—this divided soul who has never been able to find any other criterion than that of an environment which knows no criterion but success. His destiny, meanwhile, has passed out of his own hands: that is the significance of the "victory" of "The Jumping Frog." As Mr. Paine says, with terrible, unconscious irony: "The stone rejected by the builder was made the cornerstone of his literary edifice."

So much for Mark Twain's motives in becoming a humorist. He had adopted this rôle unwillingly, as a compromise, at the expense of his artistic self-respect, because it afforded the only available means of satisfying that other instinct which, in the unconsciousness of his creative instinct, had become dominant in him, the gregarious, acquisitive instinct of the success-loving pioneer. And what a corroboration that instinct now received! Was ever a choice more thrillingly ratified by public opinion! "Limelight and the center of the stage," says Mr. Paine, "was a passion of Sam Clemens's boyhood, a love of the spectacular that never wholly died. . . . Like Tom Sawyer, he loved the glare and trappings of leadership." The permanent dream of his childhood, indeed, had been to become "something gorgeous and active, where his word—his nod, even, constituted sufficient law." Here we see exhibited what Alfred Adler calls the "masculine protest," the desire to be more than manly in order to escape the feeling of insecurity, for Mark Twain, who was a weak child, could never have survived in the rough-and-tumble of Hannibal life if he had not exerted his imagination and prevailed over his companions by means other than physical. This dream had been fulfilled in his piloting career, which was at once autocratic and spectacular. United now, a deep craving to shine, with his other desire to make money, to please his family, to "make good" in pioneer terms, it received a confirmation so prodigious that the despised, rejected, repressed, inarticulate poet in Mark Twain was immediately struck dumb and his doubts and chagrins and disappointments were lulled to rest.

Already, in Nevada, Mark Twain had been pointed out as one of the sights of the territory; his sayings were everywhere repeated on the streets. Tom Sawyer was walking the stage and "revelling in his power." Crashes of applause greeted his platform sallies; "the Comstock,

ready to laugh,'' says Mr. Paine, ''found delight in his expression and discovered a vast humor in his most earnest statements''; the opera-houses of the mining-towns wherever he went were packed at two dollars a seat; ''his improved dress and increased prosperity commanded additional respect.'' He had ''acquired,'' in short, ''a new and lucrative profession at a bound''; and before he went East, and owing to the success of ''The Jumping Frog,'' ''those about him were inclined to regard him, in some degree at least, as a national literary figure, and to pay tribute accordingly.'' When he set out on the voyage of the *Quaker City* he found himself ''billed as an attraction'' with General Sherman and Henry Ward Beecher. But this was only a faint promise of the glory that was to follow the publication of ''The Innocents Abroad.'' It was his second book: his profits were $300,000, and it brought him into instant and intimate contact with the most distinguished people in America. Besides this, it brought him the recognition of *The Atlantic Monthly*. It brought him offers of political preferment: a diplomatic position, the postmastership of San Francisco, with a salary of $10,000 a year, a choice of five influential offices in California, anything he might be disposed to accept—''they want to send me abroad, as a Consul or a Minister,'' he writes from Washington: judges pledge the President's appointment, senators guarantee the confirmation of the Senate. It brought him presently a tremendous reception from ''the brains of London, assembled at the annual dinner of the sheriffs of London —mine being (between you and me),'' he writes to his publisher, ''a name which was received with a flattering outburst of spontaneous applause when the long list of guests was called.'' It brought him an offer from at least one magazine of ''$6,000 cash for twelve articles, of any length and on any subject.'' It brought him lecture engagements that paid him $1,600 in gold for a single

evening; and so popular were these lectures that when one night in Pittsburgh he "played" against Fanny Kemble, the favorite actress of the period, "Miss Kemble had an audience of two hundred against nearly ten times the number who gathered to hear Mark Twain." Could this divided soul, who had rebelled against the career into which he was drifting, question a verdict like that? Almost from the outset his filial conscience had been appeased: of his first lecture tour in Nevada and California we are told that "it paid him well; he could go home now, without shame." But even the promptings of his artistic conscience were now parried and laid at rest: "he had grown more lenient in his opinion of the merits of the 'Frog' story itself since it had made friends in high places, especially since James Russell Lowell had pronounced it 'the finest piece of humorous writing yet produced in America.'" Thus whatever doubts Mark Twain might still have harbored regarding the vital propriety of his new career were opportunely overlaid by the very persons he could not fail to respect the most.

It was this last fact, without doubt, that sealed his destiny. James Russell Lowell and "the brains of London"! There was little criticism in their careless judgments, but how was Mark Twain to know that? He was a humorist, they accepted him as a humorist; they had no means of knowing that he was intended to be something else, that he really wished to be something else. They found him funny, and he was just as funny as they found him; but to Mark Twain their praise meant more than that; it meant something like a solemn sanction of his career from the world of culture. "Certainly," says Mr. Paine, of one of his first triumphal visits to London, "certainly he was never one to give himself airs; but to have the world's great literary center paying court to him, who only ten years before had been penniless and unknown, and who once had

been a barefoot Tom Sawyer in Hannibal, was quite startling." Innocent barefoot boy! As if the true forces of criticism ever operated in the presence of a visiting foreigner! Mark Twain had not seen Englishmen applaud when Joaquin Miller, at a London dinner-table, thrust half a dozen cigars into his mouth at once and exclaimed: "That's the way we do it in the States!" He didn't know how much the tribute was a tribute to his oddity, his mere picturesqueness; he didn't know that he was being gulled, and partly because he wasn't —because the beautiful force of his natural personality would have commanded attention anywhere, because, also, "the brains of London," the brains of Guildhall banquets, are not too discriminating when it comes to "laughter and tears" with slow music, or books like "The Innocents Abroad." But Mark Twain's was not the mind to note these subtle shades. What he saw was that he was being heartily slapped on the back, in no too obviously patronizing way, by the people who really *knew,* whose judgment could really be trusted. Yet England, as a matter of fact, so far as he was concerned, was simply countersigning the verdict of America.

For if, observe, Mark Twain's first counselors at home had been plain men of business, with an eye single to returns in cash, he might have seen a light and made a stand against the career of self-exploitation into which he was drifting. It would not have been easy: from the moment when "The Jumping Frog" had "set all New York in a roar," business agents and other brokers in fame and bullion had begun to swarm about this popular young man like ravenous gulls in the wake of a ship. But the counsels of some of the most famous and revered men in America played into the hands of these agents, and surrendered Mark Twain over to them. Anson Burlingame, Henry Ward Beecher, even Artemus Ward —these must have been great names to the Nevada miner of the sixties. One was a diplomat, one a clergy-

man, one a writer; their national prestige was not based upon money; to Mark Twain they could not have seemed anything less than masters, in some degree, of the life of the spirit. And all their influence corroborated the choice Mark Twain had already made.

It was during the "flush times" in Virginia City that he had met Artemus Ward who, on the pinnacle of his career, was, for all that little Nevada world, the very symbol of the literary life itself. "Clemens," we are told, "measured himself by this man who had achieved fame, and perhaps with good reason concluded that Ward's estimate was correct, that he too could win fame and honor, once he got a start." We can see what Ward's counsel had been: he had accepted Mark Twain, not as a creative spirit with possibilities of inner growth before him—what could Artemus Ward have known about such things?—but as an embryonic institution, so to speak, as a "going concern," a man who had already capitalized himself and wanted only a few practical hints. Concretely he told him that he ought to "extend his audience eastward." Burlingame's advice was subtler, but it came to much the same thing. "You have great ability," said he; "I believe you have genius. What you need now is the refinement of association. Seek companionship among men of superior intellect and character. Refine yourself and your work. Never affiliate with inferiors; always climb." If Dostoievsky and Dickens and Victor Hugo had been constrained to accept such advice in their youth, where should we look now for "Crime and Punishment" and "Bleak House" and "Les Misérables"? We cannot blame Artemus Ward and Anson Burlingame for knowing nothing about the creative life and its processes; and how can we blame the poor, ignorant, unawakened poet in Mark Twain for not withstanding the prestige of men who, more than any others he had known, had won their spurs in the field of the spirit? Even if it had not already been too

late, there were probably not ten souls in all America capable of so divining the spirit of this lovable child as to have said to him: "You were right in wishing to repudiate that line of least resistance. Put money and fame, superiors and inferiors, out of your mind. Break your ties now and, instead of climbing, descend—into life and into yourself." Mark Twain had followed Ward's injunction and "extended his audience eastward" by going East himself. He "never forgot," we are told, "that advice" of Anson Burlingame: indeed, he acted upon it immediately by associating himself with the "choice and refined party" of the *Quaker City* excursion which led him to the feet of his future wife. But it led him first to the feet of Henry Ward Beecher, the most celebrated spiritual leader in all America. What bread and wine did Beecher offer to the unworldly poet in him? "Now here," said he—Mark Twain reports the interview in one of his letters, "now here, you are one of the talented men of the age—nobody is going to deny that—but in matters of business I don't suppose you know more than enough to come in when it rains. I'll tell you what to do and how to do it." And thereupon this priest of the ideal sat him down and showed him how to make a contract for "The Innocents Abroad" in which his percentage was a fifth more than the most opulent publishing house in the country had ever paid any author except Horace Greeley. Such were the lessons in self-help this innocent soul received from the wise men of statecraft, literature and divinity.

Thus Mark Twain was inducted into the Gilded Age, launched, in defiance of that instinct which only for a few years was to allow him inner peace, upon the vast welter of a society blind like himself, like him committed to the pursuit of worldly success.

That in becoming a humorist he had relinquished his independence as a creative spirit we can see from his general attitude toward his career. He had lapsed for

good and all into a state of what is called moral infantility. We know that the rôle of laugh-maker had, from early adolescence, come, as people say, natural to him. At sixteen, in Hannibal, when he told the story of Jim Wolfe and the cats, "his hearers laughed immoderately," says Mr. Paine, "and the story-teller was proud and happy in his success." At twenty, at a printers' banquet in Keokuk, where he made his first after-dinner speech, his humor "delighted his audience, and raised him many points in the public regard." After that, he found, he was always the center of attraction when he spoke in public. It is significant, however, that from all his triumphs he had returned faithfully to his work as a printer, just as later he had held so passionately to the guiding-line of his trade as a pilot. That persistent adherence of his, in a society given over to exploitation, to a *métier* in which he could exercise the instinct of workmanship, of craftsmanship, is the outstanding fact of Mark Twain's adolescence. It was the earnest of the artist in him: his humor was the line of least resistance. When he adopted humor as a profession, therefore, he was falling back upon a line he had previously rejected, and this implied that he had ceased to be the master of his own destiny. In short, the artist in him having failed to take the helm, he had become a journalist, and his career was now at the mercy of circumstance.

Glance forward a little. After the triumph of "The Innocents Abroad," he wrote to his publisher: "I have other propositions for a book, but have doubted the propriety of interfering with good newspaper engagements, except my way as an author could be demonstrated to be plain before me." To which Mr. Paine adds, specifically: "In spite of the immense success of his book—a success the like of which had scarcely been known in America—Mark Twain held himself to be, not a literary man, but a journalist. He had no plans for

another book; as a newspaper owner and editor he expected, with his marriage, to settle down and devote the rest of his life to journalism." Hardly the frame of mind of the writer with a living sense of his vocation! And this expressed an attitude that Mark Twain never outgrew. Hear Mr. Paine again, at the time of Clemens's fiftieth year, when his vital powers seem to have been at their highest point: "As Mark Twain in the earlier days of his marriage had temporarily put aside authorship to join in a newspaper venture, so now again literature had dropped into the background, had become an avocation, while financial interests prevailed." Financial interests!—there were whole years during which he thought of hardly anything else.

This conception of his literary career as interchangeable, so to say, with his financial career is borne out by his thoroughly journalistic attitude toward his work. Thus we find him at the outset proposing to "follow up" his success with the story of the "Hornet" disaster with a series of articles on the Sandwich Islands, and then to "take advantage of the popularity of the Hawaiian letters and deliver a lecture on the same subject." While he was writing "Roughing It" he planned a book of adventures in the diamond mines of South Africa, and so impersonal was this work that he proposed that the material for it should be gathered by an agent, whom he actually despatched. Then, says Mr. Paine, "the success of 'Roughing It' naturally made him cast about for other autobiographical material." Years later, after the failure of the Paige machine, in which he had invested all his money, we find him returning to literature and counting up his "assets," exactly as if his literary life were indeed a business enterprise. "I confined myself to the boy-life out on the Mississippi," he writes, "because that had a peculiar charm for me, and not because I was not familiar with other phases of life." And then he enumerates all the various

rôles he has played, concluding that "as the most valuable capital or culture or education usable in the building of novels is personal experience I ought to be well-equipped for that trade." It does not concern him that under all these different costumes of the miner, the prospector, the reporter, the publisher, he has been the same man, that he has really experienced not life but only modes of living: the costumes are all different, and each one is good for a new performance. It is not the artist but the salesman that speaks here, the salesman with an infallible finger for the public pulse. No more lectures in churches, he tells his agent Redpath: "People are afraid to laugh in a church"; and again, to his publishing manager regarding "Pudd'nhead Wilson": "There was nothing new in that story"—"The American Claimant"—"but the finger-prints in this one is virgin ground—absolutely *fresh,* and mighty curious and interesting to everybody." Mark Twain, who prophesied a sale of 300,000 sets of General Grant's "Memoirs" and then proceeded to sell almost exactly that number, knew very well what the public wanted: that had become his chief study. Habitually, in connection with what he was planning to do, he used the word "possibilities"—the possibilities of this, the possibilities of that—in the commercial, not in the artistic, sense; he appears always to have been occupied with the promise of profit and reputation a theme contained for him, never with its elements of artistic interest and value. That authorship was to him, in fact, not an art but a trade, and only the chief trade of a series that he had followed, in true pioneer fashion, that he thought of it not as a means of free individual expression but as something naturally conditioned by the laws of supply and demand, all the evidence of his life goes to show. I have quoted his eulogy of the old Mississippi pilot and his description of the writer, by contrast, as "a manacled servant of the public": "we write frankly and

fearlessly," he adds, naïvely, "but then we 'modify' before we print." One might imagine that such a thing as an artist had never existed.

Am I anticipating? Go back now; go back to 1867, to the moment of Mark Twain's Cooper Union lecture, when he finds himself, in the hands of his agent Fuller, advertised to "play against Speaker Colfax at Irving Hall, Ristori, and also the double troupe of Japanese jugglers." Mark Twain hesitates. Fuller is obdurate. "What we want this time," he says, "is reputation anyway—money is secondary." So he floods the house with complimentary tickets to the school-teachers of the city. "Mark," he says, after the lecture is over, "Mark, it's all right. The fortune didn't come, but it will. The fame has arrived; with this lecture and your book just out you are going to be the most talked of man in the country." It was true. But in that moment—that typical moment, in that reluctance, in that acquiescence, in that corroboration, Mark Twain's die had been cast. . . . Who is this apparition we see "hobnobbing with generals and senators and other humbugs"? The Mark Twain who is going to walk the boards of the Gilded Age. In the hour of his triumph he writes to his mother: "You observe that under a cheerful exterior I have got a spirit that is angry with me and gives me freely its contempt"; it is a formidable spirit, that *alter ego* within him,—he is going to hear its bitter promptings later on. Now, however, his triumph drowns its voice: his private, personal and domestic interests have wholly supplanted the dim and wavering sense of his vocation. "Clemens was chiefly concerned over two things," says Mr. Paine; "he wished to make money and he wished to secure a government appointment for Orion."

Mark Twain often spoke of the rigidity of determinism, of the inexorable sequence of cause and effect. As Mr. Paine says—with an emphasis of his own—he had

but to review his own life for justification of his belief. From this point on, his career was a steady process of what is called adaptation to environment. He had abdicated that spiritual independence without which the creative life is impossible. He was to "lose himself" now, to quote Whitman's phrase, in "countless masses of adjustments."

## CHAPTER V

### THE CANDIDATE FOR GENTILITY

"Follow his call? Good heavens! That is what men do as bachelors; but an engaged man only follows his bride."

IBSEN: *The Comedy of Love.*

THE Free-Thinkers' Society in "Pudd'nhead Wilson," as I have recalled, consisted of two members, Judge Driscoll, the president, and Pudd'nhead himself. "Judge Driscoll," says our author, "could be a free-thinker and still hold his place in society, because he was the person of most consequence in the community, and therefore could venture to go his own way and follow out his own notions." As for Pudd'nhead, with his crazy calendar, he was a sort of outcast, anyway; no one cared a straw what Pudd'nhead believed. It was Mark Twain's little paraphrase, that fable, of Tocqueville's comment: "I know of no country in which there is so little independence of mind and real freedom of discussion as in America." Mark Twain has corroborated this, in so many words, himself: "in our country," he says, "we have those three unspeakably precious things: freedom of thought, freedom of speech, and the prudence never to practise either." An American can have a mind of his own, in short, upon one of two conditions only: either he must be willing to stay at the bottom of the ladder of success or he must be able to climb to the top. No one cares to impugn a fool; no one dares to impugn a captain of industry.

Now when Mark Twain abdicated his independence as a creative spirit, he put his foot on the first rung

of that ladder. The children of light are all Pudd'n-heads in the eyes of the children of this world, and if Mark Twain had been able and willing to remain in the ranks of the children of light he would have been perfectly free—to starve and to shine. But once he had made his bid for success, he had to accept its moral consequences. The freedom he had lost at the foot of the ladder he could hope to regain only at the top. Meanwhile he had to play the recognized American game according to the recognized American rules.

Here Mark Twain was utterly at sea. His essential instinct, the instinct of the artist, had been thwarted and repressed. Nevertheless, just because he was essentially an artist, he was a greenhorn in the tricks of getting on. Why, it was a constant surprise to him at first that people laughed at his stories and gave him gold and silver for telling them! His acquisitive instinct, no doubt, had asserted itself with the lapse of his creative instinct; still, it was not, so to speak, a personal instinct, it was only the instinct of his heredity and his environment which had sprung up in a spirit that had been swept clear for it; it was wholly unable to focus Mark Twain. He, all his life the most inept of business men, without practical judgment, without foresight, without any of Poor Richard's virtues, was "never," says Mr. Howells, "a man who cared anything about money except as a dream, and he wanted more and more of it to fill out the spaces of this dream." Yes, to fill out the spaces the prodigious failure of his genius had left vacant! To win fame and fortune, meanwhile, as his parents had wished him to do, had now become his dominant desire, and almost every one he met knew more about the art of success than he did. He had to "make good," but in order to do so he had to subject himself to those who knew the ropes. Consequently, whoever excelled him in skill, in manners, in prestige, stood to him *in loco parentis;* and,

to complete the ironic circle, he was endlessly grateful to those who led him about, like a Savoyard bear, because he felt, as was indeed true, that it was to them he owed the success he had attained. This is the real meaning of Mr. Paine's remark: "It was always Mark Twain's habit to rely on somebody."

The list of those to whom he deferred is a long and varied one. In later years, "he did not always consult his financial adviser, Mr. Rogers," we are told, "any more than he always consulted his spiritual adviser Twitchell, or his literary adviser Howells, when he intended to commit heresies in their respective provinces." But these were the exceptions that proved the rule: in general, Mark Twain abandoned himself to the will and word of those who had won his allegiance. There was Artemus Ward, there was Anson Burlingame, there was Henry Ward Beecher: what they told him, and how he obeyed, we have just seen. There was Bret Harte, who, he said, "trimmed and trained and schooled me patiently until he changed me from an awkward utterer of coarse grotesquenesses to a writer of paragraphs and chapters that have found a certain favor in the eyes of even some of the very decentest people in the land." Above all, and among many others, there was Mr. Howells, who, from the first moment, "won his absolute and unvarying confidence in all literary affairs": indeed, adds Mr. Paine, "in matters pertaining to literature and to literary people in general he laid his burden on William Dean Howells from that day." It was to Howells that he said, apropos of "The Innocents Abroad": "When I read that review of yours I felt like the woman who was so glad her baby had come white." It has become the custom with a certain school of critics to assert that Mark Twain's spiritual rights were in some way infringed by his associates and especially by his wife, the evident fact being that he craved authority with all the

self-protective instinct of the child who has not learned safely to go his own way and feels himself surrounded by pitfalls. "There has always been somebody in authority over my manuscript and privileged to improve it," he wrote in 1900, with a touch of angry chagrin, to Mr. S. S. McClure. But the privilege had always emanated from Mark Twain himself.

In short, having lost the thread of his life and committed himself to the pursuit of prestige, Mark Twain had to adapt himself to the prevailing point of view of American society. "The middle class," says a contemporary English writer, Mr. R. H. Gretton, "is that portion of the community to which money is the primary condition and the primary instrument of life"; if that is true, we can understand why Matthew Arnold observed that the whole American population of his time belonged to the middle class. When, accordingly, Mark Twain accepted the spiritual rule of the majority, he found himself leading, to use an expression of bridge-players, from his weakest suit. It was not as a young writer capable of great artistic achievements that he was valued now, but as a promising money-maker capable of becoming a plutocrat. And meanwhile, instead of being an interesting individual, he was a social inferior. His uncouth habits, his lack of education, his outlandish manners and appearance, his very picturesqueness—everything that made foreigners delight in him, all these raw materials of personality that would have fallen into their natural place if he had been able to consummate his freedom as an artist, were mill-stones about the neck of a young man whose salvation depended upon his winning the approval of bourgeois society. His "outrageousness," as Mr. Howells calls it, had ceased to be the sign of some priceless, unformulated force; it had become a disadvantage, a disability, a mere outrageousness! That gift of humor was a gold-mine—so much every one saw: Mark Twain was evi-

dently cut out for success. But he had a lot of things to live down first! He was, in a word, a "roughneck" from the West, on probation; and if he wanted to get on, it was understood that he had to qualify. We cannot properly grasp the significance of Mark Twain's marriage unless we realize that he had been manœuvered into the rôle of a candidate for gentility.

But here, in order to go forward, we shall have to go back. What had been Mark Twain's original, unconscious motive in surrendering his creative life? To fulfill the oath he had taken so solemnly at his dead father's side; he had sworn to "make good" in order to please his mother. In short, when the artist in him had abdicated, the family man, in whom personal and domestic interests and relations and loyalties take precedence of all others, had come to the front. His home had ever been the hub of Mark Twain's universe: "deep down," says Mr. Paine, of the days of his first triumphs in Nevada, "he was lonely and homesick; he was always so away from his own kindred." And at thirty-two, able to go back to his mother "without shame," having at last retrieved his failure as a miner, he had renewed the peculiar filial bond which had remained precisely that of his infancy. Jane Clemens was sixty-four at this time, we are told, "but as keen and vigorous as ever—proud (even if somewhat critical) of this handsome, brilliant man of new name and fame who had been her mischievous, wayward boy. She petted him, joked with him, scolded him, and inquired searchingly into his morals and habits. In turn, he petted, comforted and teased her. She decided that he was the same Sam, and always would be—a true prophecy." It was indeed so true that Mark Twain, who required authority as much as he required affection, could not fail now to seek in the other sex some one who would take his mother's place. All his life, as we know, he had to be mothered by somebody, and he transferred

this filial relation to at least one other person before it found its bourn first in his wife and afterward in his daughters. This was "Mother" Fairbanks of the *Quaker City* party, who had, we are told, so large an influence on the tone and character of those travel letters which established his fame. "She sewed my buttons on," he wrote—he was thirty-two at the time—"kept my clothing in presentable form, fed me on Egyptian jam (when I behaved), lectured me awfully . . . and cured me of several bad habits." It was only natural, therefore, that he should have accepted the rule of his wife "implicitly," that he should have "gloried," as Mr. Howells says, in his subjection to her. "After my marriage," he told Professor Henderson, "she edited everything I wrote. And what is more—she not only edited my works—she edited me!" What, indeed, were Mark Twain's works in the totality of that relationship? What, for that matter, was Olivia Clemens? She was more than a person, she was a symbol. After her death Mark Twain was always deploring the responsibility he had been to her. Does he not fall into the actual phrase his mother had used about him?—"she always said I was the most difficult child she had." She was, I say, more than a person, she was a symbol; for just as she had taken the place of his mother, so at her death her daughters took her place. Mr. Paine tells how, when Mark Twain was seventy or more, Miss Clara Clemens, leaving home for a visit, would pin up a sign on the billiard-room door: "No billiards after 10 P. M." —a sign that was always outlawed. "He was a boy," Mr. Paine says, "whose parents had been called away, left to his own devices, and bent on a good time." He used to complain humorously how his daughters were always trying to keep him straight—"dusting papa off," as they called it, and how, wherever he went, little notes and telegrams of admonition followed him. "I have been used," he said, "to obeying my family all my

life." And by virtue of this lovable weakness, too, he was the typical American male.

As we can see now, it was affection rather than material self-interest that was leading Mark Twain onward and upward. It had always been affection! He had never at bottom wanted to "make good" for any other reason than to please his mother, and in order to get on he had had to adopt his mother's values of life; he had had to repress the deepest instinct in him and accept the guidance of those who knew the ropes of success. As the ward of his mother, he had never consciously broken with the traditions of Western society. Now, a candidate for gentility on terms wholly foreign to his nature, he found the filial bond of old renewed with tenfold intensity in a fresh relationship. He had to "make good" in his wife's eyes, and that was a far more complicated obligation. As we shall see, Mark Twain rebelled against her will, just as he had rebelled against his mother's, yet could not seriously or finally question anything she thought or did. "He adored her as little less than a saint," we are told: which is only another way of saying that, automatically, her gods had become his.

It is not the custom in American criticism to discuss the relations between authors and their wives: so intensely personal is the atmosphere of our society that to "stoop and botanize" upon the family affairs even of those whose lives and opinions give its tone to our civilization is regarded as a sort of sacrilege. Think of the way in which English criticism has thrashed out the pros and cons of Thomas and Jane Carlyle, Percy and Harriet Shelley, Lord and Lady Byron, and the Brontë family and the Lambs and the Rossettis! Is it to satisfy the neighborly village ear or even a mere normal concern with interesting relationships? At bottom English critics are so copious and so candid in these domestic analyses because they believe that what great

writers think and feel is of profound importance to society and because they know that what any man thinks and feels is largely determined by personal circumstances and affections. It is, no doubt, because of this frank, free habit of mind that all the best biographies even of our American worthies—Hamilton, Franklin and Lincoln, for instance—have been written by Englishmen! No one will deny, I suppose, that Mark Twain's influence upon our society has been, either in a positive or in a negative way, profound. When, therefore, we know that, by his own statement, his wife not only edited his works but edited him, we feel slightly annoyed with Mr. Howells who, whenever he speaks of Mrs. Clemens, abandons his rôle as a realist and carefully conceals that puissant personage under the veil of "her heavenly whiteness." We feel that the friend, the neighbor, the guest has prevailed in Mr. Howells's mind over the artist and the thinker and that he is far more concerned with fulfilling his personal obligations and his private loyalties than the proper public task of a psychologist and a man of letters. Meanwhile, we know that neither the wives of European authors nor, for that matter, the holy women of the New Testament have suffered any real degradation from being scrutinized as creatures of flesh and blood. If one stoops and botanizes upon Mrs. Clemens it is because, when her standards became those of her husband, she stepped immediately into a rôle far more truly influential than that of any President.

Olivia Langdon was the daughter of "a wealthy coal-dealer and mine-owner" of Elmira, New York. Perhaps you know Elmira? Perhaps, in any case, you can imagine it? Those "up-State" towns have a civilization all their own: without the traditions of moral freedom and intellectual culture which New England has never quite lost, they had been so salted down with the spoils of a conservative industrial life that they had at-

tained, by the middle of the nineteenth century, a social stratification as absolute as that of New England itself. A stagnant, fresh-water aristocracy, one and seven-eighths or two and a quarter generations deep, densely provincial, resting on a basis of angular sectarianism, eviscerated politics and raw money, ruled the roast, imposing upon all the rest of society its own type, forcing all to submit to it or to imitate it. Who does not know those august brick-and-stucco Mansard palaces of the Middle States, those fountains on the front lawn that have never played, those bronze animals with their permanent but economical suggestions of the baronial park? The quintessence of thrifty ostentation, a maximum of terrifying effect based upon a minimum of psychic expenditure! They are the Vaticans of the coal-popes of yesteryear, and all the Elmiras with a single voice proclaimed them sacrosanct.

We can imagine how Mark Twain must have been struck dumb in such a presence. "Elmira," says Mr. Paine, "was a conservative place—a place of pedigree and family tradition; that a stranger, a former printer, pilot, miner, wandering journalist and lecturer, was to carry off the daughter of one of the oldest and wealthiest families, was a thing not to be lightly permitted. The fact that he had achieved a national fame did not count against other considerations. The social protest amounted almost to insurrection." One remembers the story of Thomas Carlyle, that Scottish stone-mason's son, who carried off the daughter of Dr. Welsh of Dumfries. One conceives what Carlyle's position would have been if he had not found his own soul before he fell in love, and if Jane Welsh had been merely the passive reflection of a society utterly without respect for the life of the spirit. He would have been, and would have felt himself, the interloper then—he would not have been Carlyle but the stone-mason's son, and she would have been the Lady Bountiful. For Mark Twain had

not married an awakened soul; he had married a young girl without experience, without imagination, who had never questioned anything, understood anything, desired anything, who had never been conscious of any will apart from that of her parents, her relatives, her friends. To win her approval and her pride, therefore—and love compelled him to do that—he had to win the approval and the pride of Elmira itself, he had to win the *imprimatur* of all that vast and intricate system of privilege and convention of which Elmira was the symbol. They had all said of Olivia Langdon, who was the "family idol," that "no one was good enough for her—certainly not this adventurous soldier of letters from the West." Charles Langdon, her brother and Mark Twain's old comrade, was so mortified at having brought this ignominy upon his own household, that he set off on a voyage round the world in order to escape the wedding. Furthermore, Mark Twain's friends in California replied unanimously to Mr. Langdon's enquiries about his character, that, while he was certainly a good fellow, he would make the "worst husband on record." Would not all these things have put any lover on his mettle?

Mark Twain was on probation, and his provisional acceptability in this new situation was due not to his genius but to the fact that he was able to make money by it. What made the Langdons relent and consider his candidacy was quite plainly, as we can see from Mr. Paine's record, the vast success Mark Twain was having as a humorous journalist and lecturer. With the publication of "The Innocents Abroad," as we know, "he had become suddenly a person of substance—an associate of men of consequence": even in New York people pointed him out in the street. He was a lion, a conquering hero, and Elmira could not help yielding to that: "it would be difficult," as Mr. Paine says, "for any family to refuse relationship with one whose star was

so clearly ascending." But could he, would he, keep it up? To be sure, he considered himself, we are specifically told, not as a literary man but as a journalist; his financial pace had been set for him; "I wasn't going to touch a book," he wrote, "unless there was *money* in it, and a good deal of it"; he had already formed those habits of "pecuniary emulation" and "conspicuous waste" which Mr. Veblen has defined for us and which were almost a guarantee that he would take a common-sense view of his talent and turn it to the best financial account; three months before his marriage, this erstwhile barefoot boy was already—the best possible omen for one with his resources—$22,000 in debt! He had put his shoulder to the wheel and had proved that he was able to make money even faster than he spent it; and the instincts of the family man had so manifested themselves in his new devotion that, other things being equal—and his wife would see to that—he really was a safe, conservative risk as a wealthy coal-dealer's son-in-law. Jervis Langdon capitulated: he was a hearty soul, he had always liked Mark Twain, anyway; now he felt that this soldier of fortune could be trusted to cherish his daughter in the style, as people say, to which she had been accustomed. His own household expenses were $40,000 a year: of course they couldn't begin on that scale; it wasn't to be expected, and besides, it wasn't the custom. But, at any rate, he was going to start them off, and he was going to do it handsomely. One remembers how, in "The Gilded Age," when Philip Sterling conquers the mountain of coal that makes his fortune, he "became suddenly a person of consideration, whose speech was freighted with meaning, whose looks were all significant. The words of a proprietor of a rich coal mine," our author adds, naïvely, "have a golden sound, and his common sayings are repeated as if they were solid wisdom." Mark Twain must have had Jervis Langdon in his mind when

he wrote that: as an aspirant to fortune, he naturally stood in awe of a man who had so conspicuously arrived, and now that this man had become his own bountiful father-in-law he could not, in his gratitude, sufficiently pledge himself to keep his best financial foot forward. Jervis Langdon gave the young couple a house in a fashionable street in Buffalo, a house newly and fully fitted up, with a carriage and a coachman and all the other appointments of a prosperous *ménage*. It was a surprise, one of the unforeseen delights of Mark Twain's wedding day!—he woke up, so to speak, and found himself, with the confused and intoxicating sensations of a bridegroom, absolutely committed to a scale of living such as no mere literary man at the outset of his career could ever have lived up to. He had been fairly shanghaied into the business man's paradise! But Jervis Langdon had foreseen everything. Mark Twain's ambition at this time, we are told, "lay in the direction of retirement in some prosperous newspaper enterprise, with the comforts and companionship of a home." That was the ambition, already evoked, which his new situation confirmed, the ambition which had now fully become his because the Langdons encouraged it. And as he had no money actually on hand, his father-in-law bound himself to the extent of $25,000 and advanced half of it in cash so that Mark Twain could acquire a third interest in the Buffalo *Express*. Thus, almost without realizing it, he had actually become a business man, with love and honor obliging him to remain one.

The full consequences of this moral surrender—shall we call it?—can only appear as we go on with our story. Meanwhile, we may note that, precisely because of his divided soul, Mark Twain could not consistently and deliberately pursue the main chance. Had he been able to do so he might, in a few years, have bought his liberty; but he lost interest in his journalistic enter-

prise just as he was to lose interest in so many other lucrative enterprises in the future. And every time he was driven back to make a fresh attempt. "I have a perfect *horror* and heart-sickness over it," Mrs. Clemens wrote to her sister after the bankruptcy of the publishing house of Charles L. Webster and Co. "I cannot get away from the feeling that business failure means disgrace. I suppose it always will mean that to me. Sue, if you were to see me you would see that I have grown old very fast during this last year: I have wrinkled. Most of the time I want to lie down and cry. Everything seems to me so impossible." Naturally, inevitably; but imagine an author, who was also a devoted lover, having to respond to a stimulus like that! His bankruptcy was, to Mark Twain, like a sudden dawn of joyous freedom. "Farewell—a long farewell—to business!" he exclaimed during those weeks of what might have seemed an impending doom. "I will *never* touch it again! I will live in literature, I will wallow in it, revel in it; I will swim in ink!" But when his release finally comes he writes as follows to his wife, whom he has left in France: "Now and then a good and dear Joe Twitchell or Susy Warner condoles with me and says, 'Cheer up—don't be downhearted' . . . and none of them suspect what a burden has been lifted from me and how blithe I am inside. *Except* when I think of you, dear heart—then I am not blithe; for I seem to see you grieving and ashamed, and dreading to look people in the face. . . . You only seem to see rout, retreat, and dishonored colors dragging in the dirt—whereas none of these things exist. There is temporary defeat, but no dishonor—and we will march again. Charley Warner said to-day, 'Sho, Livy isn't worrying. So long as she's got you and the children she doesn't care what happens. She knows it isn't her affair.' Which didn't convince *me!*" No, Mrs. Clemens, who was so far from being the votary of genius, was not quite the votary of

love either; she was, before all, the unquestioning daughter of that "wealthy coal-dealer" of Elmira, who had "held about a quarter of a million in her own right"; her husband might lag and lapse as a literary man, but when he fell behind in the race of pecuniary emulation she could not help applying the spur. She had even invested her own patrimony in her husband's ventures, and all that the Paige Typesetting Machine had spared went up the chimney in the failure of Charles L. Webster and Co. Of course Mark Twain had to retrieve that! And so it went: as the years passed, owing to the very ineptitude that ought to have kept him out of business altogether, he was involved more and more deeply in it.

As we can see now, the condition of Mark Twain's survival, on probation as he was and morally pledged to make a large income, was that he should adopt the whole code of his new environment. It was for love's sake that he had put his head, so to say, into the noose; in his case the matrimonial vow had been almost literally reversed and it was he who had promised not only to love and honor but also to obey. His loyalty was laid under further obligations by certain family disasters that followed his marriage and by the weakness of his wife. A neurotic, hysterical type—at sixteen, through a fall upon the ice, she had become a complete invalid, confined to her bed for two years in a darkened room, unable to sit, even when supported, unable to lie in any position except upon her back till a wizard came one day and told her, with miraculous results, to arise and walk—Mrs. Clemens was of an almost unearthly fragility, and she seems to have remained so during the greater part of her life. "I am still nursing Livy night and day. I am nearly worn out," Mark Twain writes, shortly after his marriage; and the death of their first child, not long after, naturally intensified his almost abnormal absorption in domestic interests, his

already excessive devotion to his wife. We recall that passionate promise he had made to his brother: "I am in for it. I must go on chasing [phantoms] until I marry, *then* I am done with literature and all other bosh—that is, literature wherewith to please the general public. I shall write to please myself then." What chance did he have now, preoccupied at home, driven to support the pretentious establishment his father-in-law had wished on him, to find his own bearings and write to please that "self" which had never possessed any truly conscious existence? The whole tenor of this new life was to feminize Mark Twain, to make him feel that no loyalties are valid which conflict with domestic loyalties, that no activities are admirable which do not immediately conduce to domestic welfare, that private and familiar interests are, rightly and inevitably, the prime interests of man.

"Eve's Diary," written by Mark Twain shortly after his wife's death, is said to figure their relationship: Adam there is the hewer of wood and the drawer of water, a sort of Caliban, and Eve the arbiter in all matters of civilization. "It has low tastes," says Beauty of this Beast. "Some instinct tells me that eternal vigilance is the price of supremacy." And how Mrs. Clemens exercised it! There is something for the gods to bewail in the sight of that shorn Samson led about by a little child who, in the profound somnolence of her spirit, was merely going through the motions of an inherited domestic piety. "Her life had been circumscribed," says Mr. Paine, "her experiences of a simple sort"; but she did not hesitate to undertake "the work of polishing and purifying her life companion. She had no wish to destroy his personality, to make him over, but only to preserve his best, and she set about it in the right way—gently, and with a tender gratitude in each achievement." To preserve his best! "She sensed his heresy toward the conventions and forms which had

been her gospel; his bantering, indifferent attitude toward life—to her always so serious and sacred; she suspected that he even might have unorthodox views on matters of religion." That was before they were married: afterward, "concerning his religious observances her task in the beginning was easy enough. Clemens had not at that time formulated any particular doctrines of his own. . . . It took very little persuasion on his wife's part to establish family prayers in their home, grace before meals, and the morning reading of a Bible chapter." Thus was reëstablished over him that old Calvinistic spell of his mother's, against which he had so vainly revolted as a child: preserving his "best," as we can see, meant preserving what fitted into the scheme of a good husband, a kind father and a sagacious man of business after the order of the Jervis Langdons of this world, for Olivia Clemens had never known any other sort of hero. "In time," says Mr. Paine, with a terrible unconscious irony, "she saw more clearly with his vision, but this was long after, when she had lived more with the world, had become more familiar with its larger needs, and the proportions of created things." It was too late then; the mischief had long been done. Mark Twain frightened his wife and shocked her, and she prevailed over him by an almost deliberate reliance upon that weakness to which he, the chivalrous Southerner—the born cavalier, in reality—could not fail to respond. Why did she habitually call him "Youth"? Was it not from an instinctive sense that her power lay in keeping him a child, in asserting the maternal attitude which he could never resist? He had indeed found a second mother now, and he "not only accepted her rule implicitly," as Mr. Howells says, "but he rejoiced, he gloried in it." He teased her, he occasionally enjoyed "shivering" her "exquisite sense of decorum"; but he, who could not trust his own judgment and to whom, consequently, one taboo was as reasonable as an-

other, submitted to all her taboos as a matter of course. "I would quit wearing socks," he said, "if she thought them immoral."

It was, this marriage, as we perceive, a case of the blind leading the blind. Mark Twain had thrown himself into the hands of his wife; she, in turn, was merely the echo of her environment. "She was very sensitive about me," he wrote in his Autobiography. "It distressed her to see me do heedless things which could bring me under criticism." That was partly, of course, because she wished him to succeed for his own sake, but it was also because she was not sure of herself. We can see, between the lines of Mr. Paine's record, not only what a shy little provincial body she was, how easily thrown out of her element, how ill-at-ease in their journeyings about the world, but how far from unambitious she was also. It was for her own sake, therefore, that she trimmed him and tried to turn Caliban into a gentleman. Timid and ambitious as she was, having annexed him to herself she had to make him as presentable as possible in order to satisfy her own vanity before the eyes of those upon whose approval her happiness depended. Mark Twain told once of the torture of embarrassment with which she had had to confess at a London dinner-table that he, the great American author, had never read Balzac, Thackeray, "and the others." But Boston, from the point of view of Elmira, was almost as awe-inspiring as London. Mr. and Mrs. Clemens were often the guests of Mr. and Mrs. Howells. Here is what Mark Twain wrote to Howells after one of these visits: "I 'caught it' for letting Mrs. Howells bother and bother about her coffee, when it was 'a good deal better than we get at home.' I 'caught it' for interrupting Mrs. C. at the last moment and losing her the opportunity to urge you not to forget to send her that MS. when the printers are done with it. I 'caught it' once more for personating that drunken Colonel

James. I 'caught it' for mentioning that Mr. Longfellow's picture was slightly damaged; and when, after a lull in the storm, I confessed, shamefacedly, that I had privately suggested to you that we hadn't any *frames,* and that if you wouldn't mind hinting to Mr. Houghton, etc., etc., etc., the madam was simply speechless for the space of a minute. Then she said: 'How *could* you, Youth! The idea of sending Mr. Howells, with his sensitive nature,' " etc. She was on pins and needles, we see, and it must have been intolerable to her that, at the *Atlantic* dinners, her husband, in spite of his immense fame, sat below the salt: her whole innocent mood was that of a woman to whom the values of that good society which, as Goethe said, offers no material for poetry, are the supreme, unquestionable values and who felt that she and her brood must at all hazards learn the ropes. Mark Twain, after the enormous break of his Whittier Birthday speech, wrote to Mr. Howells: "My sense of disgrace does not abate. It grows. I see that it is going to add itself to my list of permanencies, a list of humiliations that extends back to when I was seven years old, and which keeps on persecuting me regardless of my repentances." Imagine a European man of genius having to qualify, not as an individual, but as a member of a social order into which he had not been born! Charles Dickens never felt grateful to society because it tolerated the man who had once been a waif of the streets: Mark Twain, as Mr. Paine presents him, was always the barefoot boy among the gods.

Only in the light of this general subjugation of Mark Twain's character can we understand his literary subjugation. From the moment of his marriage his artistic integrity, already compromised, had, as a matter of fact, been irreparably destroyed: quite literally, as a man of letters, his honor rooted in dishonor stood and faith unfaithful kept him falsely true. He had accepted his father-in-law's financial assistance; he had

bought his post on the Buffalo *Express;* in return, he had solemnly pledged the freedom of his mind. In these words of his Salutatory he made his pledge public: "Being a stranger it would be immodest for me to suddenly and violently assume the associate editorship of the Buffalo *Express* without a single word of comfort or encouragement to the unoffending patrons of this paper, who are about to be exposed to constant attacks of my wisdom and learning. But the word shall be as brief as possible. I only want to assure parties having a friendly interest in the prosperity of the journal that I am not going to hurt the paper deliberately and intentionally at any time. I am not going to introduce any startling reforms, nor in any way attempt to make trouble. . . . Such is my platform. I do not see any use in it, but custom is law and must be obeyed." Never, surely, was a creative will more innocently, more painlessly surrendered than in those words; marriage had been, for Mark Twain's artistic conscience, like the final whiff of chloroform sealing a slumber that many a previous whiff had already induced. With that promise to be "good," to refrain from hurting "parties having a friendly interest in the prosperity" of his journal, the artist in Mark Twain had fallen into a final trance: anybody could manipulate him now. We have seen that his wife, who had become his chief censor, having no more independence of judgment than he, simply exposed him to the control of public opinion. This, in all matters of culture, meant New England, and especially Boston, and accordingly to please Boston—impossible, terrifying task!—had become as obligatory upon Mark Twain as to please Elmira.

We have already observed the intellectual posture of Boston during the Gilded Age. Frigid and emasculate, it cast upon the presuming outsider the cold and hostile eye of an elderly maiden aunt who is not prepared to stand any nonsense. "To-morrow night," writes Mark

Twain, in one of his earlier letters, "I appear for the first time before a Boston audience—4,000 critics"; he was lecturing with Petroleum V. Nasby, and he tells how frightened Petroleum was before the ordeal. Fortunately, in a sense, for Mark Twain, he had, in Mr. Howells, a charitable sponsor, a charitable intermediary; but unfortunately for his genius Mr. Howells was no more independent than himself: Mr. Howells was almost as much the nervous and timid alien in Boston society as Mrs. Clemens, and as the latter's natural ally and supreme authority in the task of shaping her husband, instead of dispelling Mark Twain's fears he simply redoubled them. Together, like two tremulous maids dressing the plebeian daughter of some newly-rich manufacturer in order to make her presentable for a court ball, they worked over him, expurgated him, trimmed him—to his own everlasting gratitude. To Mr. Howells he wrote: "I owe as much to your training as the rude country job-printer owes to the city-boss who takes him in hand and teaches him the right way to handle his art"; and of his wife he said: "I was a mighty rough, coarse, unpromising subject when Livy took charge of me . . . and I may *still* be to the rest of the world, but not to her. She has made a very creditable job of me." And no doubt that refining process was necessary. If Mark Twain had been enabled to stand on his own feet, had been helped to discover himself as an artist, it would have resulted naturally from the growth of his own self-consciousness, his own critical sense. As it was, undertaken in behalf of a wholly false, external ideal and by people who had no comprehension of his true principle of growth, people who were themselves subservient to public opinion, it destroyed the last vestiges of his moral independence. There is a sorry tale about Mark Twain's neckties that is really symbolic of the process he was going through. It seems that long after his marriage he still continued to wear

an old-fashioned Western string-tie which was a cause of great embarrassment to his family and his friends, an ever-present reminder that his regeneration was still incomplete. No one quite knew what to do about it till at last Howells and Aldrich boldly bought him two cravats and humored him, to his wife's infinite comfort, into wearing them. In this way the mysteries of a provincial gentility—provincial because it was without a sense of proportion—were kept constantly before his mind and he, the lovable victim of his own love, a Gulliver among the Lilliputians, a sleeping Samson, surrendered his limbs to the myriad threads of convention, yielded his locks to the shears of that simple Delilah his wife.

For what sort of taste was it that Mark Twain had to satisfy? Hardly a taste for the frank, the free, the animated, the expressive! The criticism he received was purely negative. We are told that Mrs. Clemens and her friends read Meredith "with reverential appreciation," that they formed a circle of "devout listeners" when Mark Twain himself used to read Browning aloud in Hartford. Profane art, the mature expression of life, in short, was outside Mrs. Clemens's circle of ideas; she could not breathe in that atmosphere with any comfort; her instinctive notion of literature was of something that is read at the fireside, out loud, under the lamp, a family institution, vaguely associated with the Bible and a father tempering the wind of King James's English to the sensitive ears and blushing cheek of the youngest daughter. Her taste, in a word, was quite infantile. "Mrs. Clemens says my version of the blindfold novelette, 'A Murder and a Marriage,' is 'good.' Pretty strong language for her," writes Mark Twain in 1876; and we know that when he was at work on "Huckleberry Finn" and "The Prince and the Pauper," she so greatly preferred the latter that Mark Twain really felt it was rather discreditable of

him to pay any attention to "Huckleberry Finn" at all. "Imagine this fact," he wrote to Howells; "I have even fascinated Mrs. Clemens with this yarn for youth. My stuff generally gets considerable damning with faint praise out of her, but this time it is all the other way. She is become the horse-leech's daughter, and my mill doesn't grind fast enough to suit her. This is no mean triumph, my dear sir." And shortly afterward he wrote to his mother: "I have two stories, and by the verbal agreement they are both going into the same book; but Livy says they're not, and by George I she ought to know. She says they're going into separate books, and that one of them is going to be elegantly gotten up, even if the elegance of it eats up the publisher's profits and mine, too." It was "The Prince and the Pauper," a book that anybody might have written but whose romantic medievalism was equally respectable in its tendency and infantile in its appeal, that Mrs. Clemens felt so proud of: "nobody," adds Mr. Paine, "appears to have been especially concerned about Huck, except, possibly the publisher." Plainly it was very little encouragement that Mark Twain's natural genius received from these relentless critics to whom he stood in such subjection, to whom he offered such devotion; for Mr. Howells, too, if we are to accept Mr. Paine's record, seconded him as often as not in these innocuous, infantile ventures, abetting him in the production of "blindfold novelettes" and plays of an abysmal foolishness. As for Mark Twain's unique masterpiece, "Huckleberry Finn," "I like it only tolerably well, as far as I have got," he writes, "and may possibly pigeonhole or burn the MS. when it is done"; to which Mr. Paine adds: "It did not fascinate him as did the story of the wandering prince. He persevered only as the story moved him. . . . Apparently, he had not yet acquired confidence or pride enough in poor Huck to exhibit him, even to friends." And quite nat-

urally! His artistic self-respect had been so little developed, had been, in fact, so baffled and abashed by all this mauling and fumbling that he could take no pride in a book which was, precisely, the mirror of the unregenerate past he was doing his best to live down.

Behold Mrs. Clemens, then, in the rôle of critic and censor. A memorandum Mark Twain made at the time when he and she were going over the proofs of "Following the Equator" shows us how she conceived of her task. It is in the form of a dialogue between them:

Page 1,020, 9th line from the top. I think some other word would be better than "stench." You have used that pretty often.

But can't I get it in *any*where? You've knocked it out every time. Out it goes again. And yet "stench" is a noble, good word.

Page 1,038. I hate to have your father pictured as lashing a slave boy.

It's out, and my father is whitewashed.

Page 1,050, 2nd line from the bottom. Change "breech-clout." It's a word that you love and I abominate. I would take that and "offal" out of the language.

You are steadily weakening the English tongue, Livy.

We can see from this that to Mrs. Clemens virility was just as offensive as profanity, that she had no sense of the difference between virility and profanity and vulgarity, that she had, in short, no positive taste, no independence of judgment at all. We can see also that she had no artistic ideal for her husband, that she regarded his natural liking for bold and masculine language, which was one of the outward signs of his latent greatness, merely as a literary equivalent of bad manners, as something that endangered their common prestige in the eyes of conventional public opinion. She condemned his writings, says Mr. Paine, specifically, "for the offense they might give in one way or an-

other''; and that her sole object, however unconscious, in doing this was to further him, not as an artist but as a popular success, and especially as a candidate for gentility, is proved by the fact that she made him, as we observe in the incident of his father and the slave boy, whitewash not only himself but his family history also. And in all this Mr. Howells seconded her. ''It skirts a certain kind of fun which you can't afford to indulge in,'' he reminds our shorn Samson in one of his letters; and again, ''I'd have that swearing out in an instant,'' the ''swearing'' in this case being what he himself admits is ''so exactly the thing Huck would say''—namely, ''they comb me all to hell.'' As for Mark Twain himself, he took it as meekly as a lamb. Mr. Paine tells of a certain story he had written that was disrespectful to the Archbishop of Canterbury. Forbidden to print it, he had ''laboriously translated it into German, with some idea of publishing it surreptitiously; but his conscience had been too much for him. He had confessed, and even the German version had been suppressed.'' And how does he accept Mr. Howells's injunction about the ''swearing'' in ''Huckleberry Finn''? ''Mrs. Clemens received the mail this morning,'' he writes, ''and the next minute she lit into the study with danger in her eye and this demand on her tongue, 'Where is the profanity Mr. Howells speaks of?' Then I had to miserably confess that I had left it out when reading the MS. to her. Nothing but almost inspired lying got me out of this scrape with my scalp. Does your wife give you rats, like that, when you go a little one-sided?''

They are very humiliating, these glimpses of great American writers behind the scenes, given ''rats'' by their wives whenever they stray for an instant from the strait and narrow path that leads to success. ''Once,'' writes Mr. Paine, ''when Sarah Orne Jewett was with the party—in Rome—he remarked that if the old mas-

ters had labeled their fruit one wouldn't be so likely to mistake pears for turnips. 'Youth,' said Mrs. Clemens, gravely, 'if you do not care for these masterpieces yourself, you might at least consider the feelings of others'; and Miss Jewett, regarding him severely, added, in her quaint Yankee fashion: 'Now you've been spoke to!' " Very humiliating, very ignominious, I say, are these tableaux of "the Lincoln of our literature" in the posture of an ignorant little boy browbeaten by the dry sisters of Culture-Philistia. Very humiliating, and also very tragic!

Mark Twain had come East with the only conscious ambition that Western life had bred in him, the ambition to succeed in a practical sense, to win wealth and fame. But the poet in him was still astir, still seeking, seeking, seeking for corroboration, for the frank hand and the gallant word that might set it free. We know this from the dim hope of liberation he had associated with the idea of marriage, and we can guess that his eager desire to meet "men of superior intellect and character" was more than half a desire to find some one who could give him that grand conception of the literary life which he had never been able to formulate, some one who could show him how to meet life in the proud, free way of the artist, how to unify himself and focus his powers. Well, he had met the best, the greatest, he had met the man whom the Brahmins themselves had crowned as their successor, he had met Mr. Howells. And in this man of marvelous talent, this darling of all the gods and all the graces, he had encountered once more the eternal, universal, instinctive American subservience to what Mr. Santayana calls "the genteel tradition." He had reached, in short, the heaven of literature and found it empty, and there was nothing beyond for the poet in him to seek.

Consider, if I seem to be exaggerating, the story of "Captain Stormfield's Visit to Heaven," which lay in

Mark Twain's safe for forty years before he dared to publish it. That little tale was slight enough in itself, but he was always tinkering with it: as the years went on it assumed in his eyes an abnormal importance as the symbol of what he wished to do and was prohibited from doing. "The other evening," his little daughter Susy records in 1886, "as papa and I were promenading up and down the library, he told me that he didn't expect to write but one more book, and then he was ready to give up work altogether, die, or do anything; he said that he had written more than he had ever expected to, and the only book that he had been particularly anxious to write was one locked up in the safe downstairs, not yet published." He had begun it in 1868, even before he had issued "The Innocents Abroad," the vast popular success of which had overlaid this tentative personal venture that he had been prevented, because of its "blasphemous" tendency, from pursuing. There was his true line, the line of satire—we know it as much from the persistence with which he clung to that book as from his own statement that it was the only one he had been particularly anxious to write; there was his true line, and he had halted in it for want of corroboration. And what was Mr. Howells's counsel? "When Howells was here last," writes Mark Twain to his brother Orion in 1878, "I laid before him the whole story without referring to the MS. and he said: 'You have got it sure this time. But drop the idea of making mere magazine stuff of it. Don't waste it. Print it by itself—publish it first in England—ask Dean Stanley to endorse it, which will draw some of the teeth of the religious press, and then reprint in America." There was the highest ideal, the boldest conception, of personal freedom, of the independence of the spirit, of the function of literature that Mark Twain had found in America. "Neither Howells nor I," he adds, "believe in hell or the divinity of the Savior, but no mat-

ter." No matter, no! The integrity of the spirit had become as indifferent to him as it was to the Gilded Age itself. He, this divided soul, had sought the great leader and had found only an irresponsible child like himself, a child who told him that you had to sneak off behind the barn if you wanted to smoke the pipe of truth.

Is it remarkable, then, that having found in the literary life as it shaped itself in industrial America every incentive to cower and cringe and hedge, and no incentive whatever to stand upright as a man—is it remarkable, I say, that Mark Twain should have relapsed into the easy, happy posture that came so natural to him in the presence of his wife, the posture of the little boy who is licensed to play the literary game as much as he likes so long as he isn't too rude or too vulgar and turns an honest penny by it and never forgets that the real business of life is to make hay in fame and fortune and pass muster, in course of time, as a gentleman? "Smoke?" he writes. "I always smoke from three till five on Sunday afternoons, and in New York, the other day, I smoked a week day and night. . . . And once or twice I smouched a Sunday when the boss wasn't looking. Nothing is half so good as literature hooked on Sunday, on the sly." Incorrigible naughty boy! He never dreams of asserting a will of his own; but doesn't he delight in his freedom from responsibility, isn't it a relief to be absolved from the effort of creating standards of his own and living up to them?

"A man is never anything but what his outside influences have made him," wrote Mark Twain, years later. "It is his human environment which influences his mind and his feelings, furnishes him his ideals, and sets him on his road and keeps him in it. If he leave that road he will find himself shunned by the people whom he most loves and esteems, and whose approval he most values." He who so willingly suppressed, at his wife's

command, the first germ of the book he was to call his "Bible," a deistical note on God, who had formed the habit of withholding views which he thought would strike his neighbors as "shocking, heretical and blasphemous," who, in spite of his true opinions, spoke of himself in public to the end of his life as a Presbyterian, who had, in fact, like the chameleon which he said man was, taken the religious color of his environment, just as he had taken its social and financial color —had he not virtually ceased to feel any obligation to his own soul?

"If," he wrote, in "What is Man?", "if that timid man had lived all his life in a community of human rabbits, had never read of brave deeds, had never heard speak of them, had never heard any one praise them nor express envy of the heroes that had done them, he would have had no more idea of bravery than Adam had of modesty, and it could never by any possibility have occurred to him to *resolve* to become brave. He *could not originate the idea*—it had to come to him from the *outside.*"

The tell-tale emphasis of those italics! Is not that drab philosophy of Mark Twain's, that cumbrous chain of argument, just one long pathetic plea in self-extenuation?

## CHAPTER VI

### EVERYBODY'S NEIGHBOR

"Friends are an expensive luxury; and when a man's whole capital is invested in a calling and a mission in life, he cannot afford to keep them. The costliness of keeping friends does not lie in what one does for them, but in what one, out of consideration for them, refrains from doing. This means the crushing of many an intellectual germ."

IBSEN: *Letter to Brandes,* 1870.

AND now, behold the burgeoning, the efflorescence of the Mark Twain that all America knew! Forgotten, deeply buried, is the "queer, fanciful, uncommunicative child" of earlier days, forgotten is the grave and passionate young poet of the Mississippi, the pilot, even the miner who used to go off by himself and brood among those vague thoughts of his. Forgotten is the young poet and still unborn is the cynical philosopher of the years to come. Now, and for at least one glowing decade, Mark Twain finds himself, as he says, "thoroughly and uniformly and unceasingly happy." He has not faced the conflict in his own soul, he has simply surrendered and repressed his leading instinct, and every great surrender brings with it a sensation of more or less joyous relief: were it not for the bitterness which that repression is destined to engender, who could regret indeed that he has found in quotidian interests and affections and appetites so complete an escape from the labors and the struggles of the creative spirit? Meanwhile, as his individuality sinks back, the race-character emerges; he reverts to type, and everything characteristic of his pioneer heritage, his pioneer environment, comes to the surface in him. It is like a

sudden flowering in his nature of all the desires of those to whom his own desire has, from the outset of his life, subjected itself!

Mr. Herbert Croly, in his life of Mark Hanna, has described that worthy as the typical pioneer business man. "Personalities and associations," he says, "composed the substance" of Mark Hanna's life; "his disposition was active, sympathetic, and expansive; and it was both uncritical and uncalculating. He accepted from his surroundings the prevailing ideas and modes of action"; he had "an instinctive disposition towards an expansive, all-round life." Such was the character of "Boss Hanna"; trait by trait, it had now become the prevailing character of Mark Twain. Had he not endeavored to make himself over into another person, a person in whom his family might take pride and pleasure? He had striven to satisfy their standards, to do and feel and think and admire as they did and felt and thought and admired; and at last the metamorphosis had, to all appearances, taken place. Mark Twain had become primarily the husband, the father, and the business man with responsibilities, the purpose of whose writing was to please his friends, make money, and entertain his own household. That vast, unemployed artistic energy of his, however, which had not found its proper channel, overflowed this narrow mold. Mark Twain was like a stream dammed in mid-career; and so powerful was that unconscious current which had been checked that instead of turning into a useful mill-pond he became a flood.

We have seen that his home had always been the hub of Mark Twain's universe. "Upset and disturbed" as he often was, says Mr. Paine, "he seldom permitted his distractions to interfere with the program of his fireside." It was there, indeed, that all the latent poetry of his nature, the poetry that so seldom got into his books, found its vent. "To us," he wrote once, "our

house was not unsentient matter—it had a heart and a soul and eyes to see us with, and approvals and solicitudes and deep sympathies; it was of us, and we were in its confidence, and lived in its grace and in the peace of its benediction. We never came home from an absence that its face did not light up and speak out its eloquent welcome—and we could not enter it unmoved." It is evident from this how much of the energy of Mark Twain's imagination had passed neither into his art nor, exactly, into his love, but rather into the worship of the hearth itself as the symbol, one might say, of his one great piety. "From the very beginning," says Mr. Paine, "Mark Twain's home meant always more to him than his work": indeed, in the name of his domestic ties, he had as completely surrendered his individuality as any monk in the name of religion. Naturally his home was important to him; it had become the spring of all his motives and all his desires. And having accepted the rôle of the opulent householder, he threw into it as much energy as two ordinary men are able to throw into their life-work.

Mark Twain had accepted his father-in-law's challenge: he was not going to fall behind the pace set by a coal-merchant whose household expenses were $40,000 a year. No one ever delighted more than he now in living up to those principles of "the conspicuous consumption of goods," "predatory emulation" and "the pecuniary canons of taste" which, according to Mr. Veblen, actuate the propertied class. "A failure to increase one's visible consumption when the means for an increase are at hand is felt in popular apprehension," says Mr. Veblen, "to call for explanation, and unworthy motives of miserliness are imputed to those who fall short in this respect." Of course Mark Twain couldn't stand that! As early as 1875 he writes to Mr. Howells: "You see I take a vile, mercenary view of things—but then my household expenses are some-

thing almost ghastly": he estimated that in the year 1881 he had spent considerably more than $100,000. "It was with the increased scale of living," says Mr. Paine, "that Clemens had become especially eager for some source of commercial profit; something that would yield a return, not in paltry thousands, but hundreds of thousands. Like Colonel Sellers, he must have something with 'millions in it.'" This was the visible sign that his mode of living had now become permanently extravagant. In 1906, long after his wife had died and when he was living much of the time virtually alone, his household expenses amounted, according to Mr. Paine, "to more than fifty dollars a day. In the matter of food, the choicest and most expensive the market could furnish was always served in lavish abundance. He had the best and highest-priced servants, ample as to number." Certainly his natural taste, which was always, we are told, for a simple, inexpensive style, would never have set that scale: it was a habit he had formed in those early efforts to qualify as an admired citizen. And so was his "disposition towards an expansive, all-round life," a disposition that finally made all concentration impossible to him. "In his large hospitality, and in a certain boyish love of grandeur," says Mr. Paine, "he gloried in the splendor of his entertainment, the admiration and delight of his guests. There were *always* guests; they were coming and going constantly. Clemens used to say that he proposed to establish a 'bus line between their house and the station for the accommodation of his company. . . . For the better portion of the year he was willing to pay the price of it, whether in money or in endurance"—after a while he virtually gave up all thought of writing except during the summer months: "I cannot write a book at home," he frankly told his mother—"and Mrs. Clemens heroically did her part. She loved these things also, in her own

way. She took pride in them, and realized that they were a part of his vast success. Yet in her heart she often longed for the simpler life—above all, for the farm life at Elmira. Her spirit cried out for the rest and comfort there." Could anything be more ironical? It was to satisfy her that he had repressed in himself the child of light in order to become the child of this world, and now she found herself actually drowning in the flood of that deflected energy!

To shine, meanwhile, to make money, to rival and outrival those whom the public most admired had become Mark Twain's ruling passion. With the beginning of his life in Buffalo he was already "a man of large consequence and events," and I have suggested that in the process of adapting himself all the latent instincts of his heritage had risen up in him. Take, for instance, that mechanical ingenuity which is one of the outstanding traits of the pioneer mind: it would certainly have remained in abeyance if Mark Twain had followed his natural tendency and become absorbed in literature. Now, however, with his ever-increasing need of money, it came to the fore and was by way of turning him into a professional inventor. At any rate, he invented, among other things, a waistcoat enabling the wearer to dispense with suspenders, a shirt requiring no studs, a perpetual calendar watch-charm, a method of casting brass dies for stamping book-covers and wall-paper and a postal-check to supplant the money-order in common use—not to mention the "Mark Twain Scrap-Book" which he did not hesitate, so confused were his artistic and his commercial motives, to promote under his own name. He had, moreover, an unfailing interest in the mechanical devices of other people. When he installed a telharmonium in his house at Redding he made a little speech telling his friends that he had been the first author in the world to use a typewriter for manuscript work—his impression was that

"Tom Sawyer" was the first book to be copied in this way, but Mr. Paine thinks it was "Life on the Mississippi"—that he had been one of the earliest users of the fountain-pen, and that his had been the first telephone ever used in a private house. To this we can add that he was one of the first to use the phonograph for dictation and one of the first purchasers also of the high-wheeled bicycle. We can see one reason for this eager interest in mechanical inventions in the fact that out of it grew many of those adventures in financial speculation to which also, in true pioneer fashion, Mark Twain was drawn like steel to the magnet. He invested, and usually lost, large sums of money in the following patents: a steam generator, a steam pulley, a new method of marine telegraphy, a new engraving process, a new cash-register, a spiral hatpin. His losses in almost every one of these enterprises amounted to between twenty-five and thirty thousand dollars, and this is not to mention the Paige Typesetting Machine, which cost him nearly two hundred thousand dollars and whole years out of his life. He complained of the anxiety these ventures caused him, of the frantic efforts he had to make in order to collect the money to invest in them. But he had no choice now. He had to make money to keep the mill going at home and he had to make money in order to make money; besides, he was the victim of his own past, of the gambling habits of the gold-fields. Within one month after the happy conclusion of those agonizing years of struggle to redress his bankruptcy, he was negotiating with an Austrian inventor for a machine that was to be used to control the carpet-weaving industries of the world, planning a company to be capitalized at fifteen hundred million dollars.

Can we not see what an immense creative force must have been displaced in order to give passage to this "desire," as Mr. Paine calls it, "to heap up vast and

sudden sums, to revel in torrential golden showers"? Mark Twain "boiled over," we are told, with projects for the distribution of General Grant's book: "his thoughts were far too busy with plans for furthering the sale of the great military memoir to follow literary ventures of his own." He had taken over the book because, as "the most conspicuous publisher in the world"—for this he had, in fact, become—he had an immense plant going, yawning, one might say, for the biggest available mouthful. His profit from this particular enterprise was $150,000; "Huckleberry Finn" brought him, at about the same time, $50,000 more: "I am frightened," he wrote, "at the proportions of my prosperity. It seems to me that whatever I touch turns to gold." His blood was up now, however; he was insatiable; how could he who, as a miner, had known what it was to be a "millionaire for ten days," and who had become the servant of no conscious creative principle, resist the propulsion of a demoralized money-sense? There, at least, that balked energy of his might express itself freely, gorgeously, to the applause of all America. We see him planning to make millions from a certain game of English kings; proposing a grand tour of authors—he and Howells, Aldrich and Cable, are to swing about the country in a private car, with himself as impresario and paymaster, "reaping a golden harvest"; calculating that the American business alone of the Paige Typesetting Machine is going to yield thirty-five millions a year. What if he and his family are, almost literally, killing themselves with anxiety over that infernal invention, which cost them three thousand dollars a month for three years and seven months? What if his life is broken by feverish business trips across the ocean, by swift and deadly forays against the publishing pirates of Canada? What if he is in a state of chronic agitation and irritation, "excited, worried, impatient, rash, frenzied, and altogether upset"? He is living against

the grain; no matter, he is living the true American life, living it with a mad fervor. He cannot even publish a book in the ordinary way, he has to make a fortune out of every one: "a book in the trade," he says, "is a book thrown away, as far as money-profit goes. . . . Any other means of bringing out a book [than subscription] is privately printing it." He "liked the game of business," Mr. Paine says, "especially when it was pretentious and showily prosperous." Yes, there Tom Sawyer might swagger to his heart's content and have all the multitude, and the enemies of his own household, with him. "Here I am," he exclaims, in the vision of the fortune that "poet in steel," Paige, is going to bring him—"here I am one of the wealthiest grandees in America, one of the Vanderbilt gang, in fact." Could Elmira have asked more of him than that?

For Mark Twain was not simply living the bourgeois life now; he had adopted all the values and ideals of the bourgeoisie. Success, prestige, position, wealth had become his gods and the tribal customs of a nation of traders identical in his mind with the laws of the universe.

He was, after all, a literary man; yet as a publisher he was more oblivious to the advancement of literature than the ordinary man of the trade. His policy was the pursuit of "big" names, and that alone. What were the works issued or projected under his direction by the firm of Charles L. Webster and Co.? The memoirs of General Grant, General Sheridan, General McClellan, General Hancock and Henry Ward Beecher, the "Life of Pope Leo XIII," and a book by the King of the Sandwich Islands. It was not even greatness outside of literature that he sought for, it was mere notoriety: one would say that in his lifelong passion for getting his name and fame associated with those of other men who were secure of the suffrages of the multitude

Mark Twain was almost consciously bidding for approval and corroboration. He had that slavish weakness of all commercialized men: he worshiped, regardless of his own shadowy convictions, any one who was able to "put it over." We know what he thought of Cecil Rhodes, yet "I admire him," he said, "I frankly confess it; and when his time comes, I shall buy a piece of the rope for a keepsake." As for Mrs. Eddy, he finds her "grasping, sordid, penurious, famishing for everything she sees—money, power, glory—vain, untruthful, jealous, despotic, arrogant, insolent, illiterate, shallow, immeasurably selfish" . . . yet still . . . "in several ways the most interesting woman that ever lived, and the most extraordinary. It is quite within the probabilities," he goes on, regarding the founder of Christian Science, "that a century hence she will be the most imposing figure that has cast its shadow across the globe since the inauguration of our era." Why, pray? Because of her genius for organization, because of her success in "putting over" what he freely calls, in spite of his faith in its methods, the greatest hoax in history. And why did he admire modern Germany and despise modern France? The Frenchman, he said, is "the most ridiculous creature in the world"; his "only race prejudice" was against the French. In this, and in his blind worship of imperial Germany, he reflected the view which the majority of American business men have conveniently forgotten of late years that they ever held. It was not the old Germany that he admired—never that! It was Wilhelm's Germany, Bismarck's Germany. He who, in the "Connecticut Yankee," had set out to make mediæval England a "going concern" could hardly do other than adore the most splendid example of just that phenomenon in all history.

Mark Twain had, in fact, taken on the whole character and point of view of the American magnate. How enormously preoccupied his later European letters are,

for instance, with hotels, cabs, couriers, all the appurtenances of your true Western packing-house prince on tour! We are told that once, by some tragic error, he installed himself and his family in a quarter of Berlin which was "eminently not the place for a distinguished man of letters," and that he hastened to move to one of the best addresses in the city, of which "there was no need to be ashamed." He had become, we see, something of a snob: a fact illustrated by a sorry episode in Mr. Paine's biography which he remembered with a feeling of guilt and mortification. He had engaged a poor divinity student to go abroad with him and his family as an amanuensis and he told how that young man had met them, in his bedraggled raiment, on the deck of the ship, just as they were about to sail: "He came straight to us, and shook hands and compromised us. Everybody could see that we knew him." What supremely mattered to Mark Twain now was the pomp and circumstance of his own prestige: so touchy had he become that we find him employing an agent in England to look up the sources of a purely imaginary campaign of abuse he thought a certain New York newspaper was carrying on against him. He wrote, but did not mail, "blasting" letters to his assailants and those who crossed or criticized him; he indulged in ferocious dreams of libel suits, this man who had staked everything on his reputation! Was it not his glory that he was "beset by all the cranks and beggars in Christendom"? His pride was not in his work, it was in his power and his fame.

Thus it came to pass, in these middle years of his life, that while in the old world virtually every writer of eminence was inalterably set against the life-destroying tendencies of capitalistic industrialism, Mark Twain found himself the spokesman of the Philistine majority, the headlong enthusiast for what he called "the plainest and sturdiest and infinitely greatest and worthiest

of all the centuries the world has seen." The second half of "Life on the Mississippi" glows with complacent satisfaction over the march of what he was pleased to accept as progress, the purely quantitative progress of an expanding materialism; it bristles with statistics, it resembles, in fact, nothing so much as the annual commercial supplement of a Western newspaper. In 1875, when he was on one of his many pinnacles of prosperity, he wrote a Utopia, "The Curious Republic of Gondour." And what was the sort of improvement he showed there that he desired for the world? He suggested that "for every fifty thousand 'sacos' a man added to his property he was entitled to another vote." The fable was published anonymously: the great democratic humorist could hardly father in public the views of the framers of the American Constitution. But we can see from this how far Mark Twain, like the chameleon which he said man was, had taken the colors of the privileged class which the new industrial régime had brought forth and of which his own material success had made him a member.

His essential instinct, as we know, was antagonistic to all this; his essential instinct, the instinct of the artist, placed him naturally in the opposition with all the great European writers of his age. Turn to his letters and see what he says in the privacy of his correspondence and memoranda. He is strongly against the tariff; he vehemently defends the principle of the strike and woman suffrage; he is consistently for the union of labor as against the union of capital; he bitterly regrets the formation of the Trusts; "a ruling public and political aristocracy which could create a presidential succession" is, he says, neither more nor less than monarchism. He deals one blow after another against the tendencies of American imperialism, against the Balance of Power, against the Great Power system. And hear what he writes in 1887: "When I finished Carlyle's 'French

Revolution' in 1871, I was a Girondin; every time I have read it since I have read it differently . . . and now I lay the book down once more, and recognize that I am a Sansculotte!—and not a pale, characterless Sansculotte, but a Marat." All this in the privacy of his correspondence! In public, he could not question, he did not wish to question, the popular drift of his age, the popular cry of his age, "Nothing succeeds like success"! Shall I be told that he created quite a scandal in Hartford by deserting the Republican party and becoming a Mugwump? At least he was in very respectable company. In his impetuous defence of "the drive and push and rush and struggle of the living, tearing, booming, nineteenth, the mightiest of all the centuries," he was incessantly fighting his own instincts: we find him, in one situation after another, defending on the most factitious grounds, for trumped up reasons which he had to give his conscience but which he would have laughed at if any one else had used them, vindicating, frantically vindicating, causes which he loathed in his heart but which he was constrained to consider just. Is it the Boer war? It is abhorrent to him, and yet he insists that England's hand must be upheld. He rages in secret for the weaker; in public, an infallible monitor keeps him on the winning side. All that year, we note, "Clemens had been tossing on the London social tide"; he had to mind his Ps and Qs in London drawing-rooms. And consider his remarks on the annexation of the Sandwich Islands. We can give them, he says, "leather-headed juries, the insanity law, and the Tweed ring. . . . We can make that little bunch of sleepy islands the hottest corner on earth, and array it in the moral splendor of our high and holy civilization. . . . 'Shall we, to men benighted, the lamp of life deny'?" Do you imagine that he is overtly opposed to the annexation? No, we have Mr. Paine's word for it that this was Mark Twain's peculiar fashion of urging

the step. At this very time he was coining money out of his lectures on Hawaii: he could hardly have afforded to take the unpopular view that found expression in his letters. In Berlin our fanatical anti-monarchist compresses his angry views about rebellion against kings into a few secret lines hastily written in his hotel bedroom: then, having been cleverly invited to dine at the Kaiser's right hand, he proceeds to tell the world in a loud voice how incomparable the German Empire is. He was keeping a court of his own, in Berlin, in Vienna, with generals and ambassadors dancing attendance on him!—how could he have spoken out? Yet it was not hypocrisy, this perpetual double-dealing, though we should certainly have thought it so if psychology had not made us familiar with the principle of the "watertight compartment": Mark Twain was the chronic victim of a mode of life that placed him bodily and morally in one situation after another where, in order to survive, he had to violate the law of his own spirit. To him, in short, all success was a fatality; and just in the degree that his repressed self raged against it, his dominant self became its hierophant, its fugleman. He who wrote an article passionately advocating that the salaries of American ambassadors should be quadrupled and that an official costume should be devised for them showed how utterly he failed of any sense of the true function of the man of letters; he had become, quite without realizing it, the mouthpiece of the worldly interests of a primitive commercial society with no ideal save that of material prestige and aggrandizement.

As we have seen, personal and private loyalties had come to take precedence in Mark Twain's mind over all other loyalties; no ideal, with him, no purpose, no belief, was to be weighed for a moment if the pursuit of it, or the promulgation of it, was likely to hurt the feelings of a friend. Quite early in his career he planned a book on England and collected volumes of notes for

it only to give over the scheme because he was afraid his criticism or his humor would "offend those who had taken him into their hearts and homes." Imagine Emerson having been prevented by any such consideration from writing "English Traits"! I have pointed out how utterly Mark Twain had failed to rise to the conception of literature as a great impersonal social instrument, how immersed he was in the petty, provincial values of a semi-rustic bourgeoisie among whom the slightest expression of individuality was regarded as an attack on somebody's feelings or somebody's pocket-book. As time had gone on, therefore, and his circle of friends had come to include most of the main pillars of American society, it had become less and less possible for the tongue-tied artist in him to assert itself against the complacent pioneer. We know what his instinctive religious tendency was; yet he had a fatal way of entangling his loyalties with very dogmatic ministers of the gospel. We know what his instinctive economic and political tendencies were; yet the further he advanced in his business activities, and the more he failed in them, the more deeply he involved himself with all the old freebooters of capitalism. How, then, could he have developed and expressed any of these tendencies in his writings? He whose "closest personal friend and counselor for more than forty years," as Mr. Paine says, was the pastor of what he had once, in a moment of illumination, called the "Church of the Holy Speculators" in Hartford; who, from the depths of his gratitude, was to say of H. H. Rogers, when the latter rescued him in his bankruptcy, "I never had a friend before who put out a hand and tried to pull me ashore when he found me in deep water"—this man had given too many hostages to the established order ever seriously to attack that order. His dominant self had no desire to attack it; his dominant self was part and parcel of it. Some one offered him as a publisher a

book arraigning the Standard Oil Co. "I wanted to say," he wrote, "the only man I care for in the world, the only man I would give a d—— for, the only man who is lavishing his sweat and blood to save me and mine from starvation is a Standard Oil magnate. If you know me, you know whether I want the book or not." His obligations had gradually come to be innumerable. We find him urging Mr. Rogers to interest the Rockefellers "and the other Standard Oil chiefs" in Helen Keller, trying to inveigle Carnegie into his moribund publishing business as a partner, accepting from "Saint Andrew's" "Triumphant Democracy" the suggestion for his own "Connecticut Yankee" and from Saint Andrew himself a constant supply of Scotch whiskey, begging his "affectionate old friend Uncle Joe" Cannon to accomplish for him a certain piece of copyright legislation. How was Mark Twain to set himself up as a heretic, he who had involved himself over head and ears in the whole complex of popular commercial life, he who was himself one of the big fish in the golden torrent? Only once, in a little book published after his death, "Mark Twain and the Happy Island," does one find his buried self showing its claws. It is there recorded that Mr. Rockefeller, Jr., having asked him to speak before his Sunday School class, Mark Twain suggested as his topic an exposition of Joseph's Egyptian policy. The invitation was not repeated.

So we see Mark Twain, this playboy, the pioneer in letters, the strayed reveller, the leader of the herd, giving and taking with a hearty liberality, all inside the folk-feeling of his time, holding the American nation in the hollow of his hand—the nation, or rather the epoch, whose motto he had coined in the phrase, "Tell the truth or trump—but get the trick." Never was a writer more perfectly at home with his public—he does not hesitate, in his speeches and asides, to pour out

the most intimate details of his domestic life, knowing as he does that all America, all prosperous America, is just one good-humored family party. When he fails in business, cheques pour in upon him from every corner of the country: "It was known," says Mr. Paine, "that Mark Twain had set out for the purpose of paying his debts, and no cause would make a deeper appeal to his countrymen than that, or, for that matter, to the world at large." At Hartford, we are told, the whole neighborhood was "like one great family with a community of interests, a unity of ideals," and gradually that circle, "Holy Speculators" and all, had widened until Mark Twain had become everybody's neighbor.

Have I noted enough of his traits to show that in his dominant character he had become the archtypical pioneer? Let me note them once more: an uncritical and uncalculating temper, a large, loose desire for an expansive and expensive all-round life, a habit of accepting from his surroundings "the prevailing ideas and modes of action," a naïve worship of success and prestige, an eager and inveterate interest in mechanical inventions and commercial speculation, an instinctive habit of subjugating all loyalties to personal and domestic loyalties. To this let us add, finally, the versatile career of the jack-of-all-trades. "I have been through the California mill," he said, "with all its 'dips, spurs and angles, variations and sinuosities.' I have worked there at all the different trades and professions known to the catalogues." And once, as if to show that he had qualified for the popular rôle and had forestalled what Mr. Croly calls the distrust and aversion of the pioneer democracy for the man with a special vocation and high standards of achievement, he drew up a list of his occupations and found that he had been a printer, a pilot, a soldier, a miner in several kinds, a reporter, a lecturer and a publisher: also "an author for twenty years and an ass for fifty-five."

It is only with all this in mind that we can grasp Mark Twain's instinctive conception of the literary career. He never thought of literature as an art, as the study and occupation of a lifetime: it was merely the line of activity which he followed more consistently than any other. Primarily, he was the business man, exploiting his imagination for commercial profit, his objects being precisely those of any other business man —to provide for his family, to gain prestige, to make money because other people made money and to make more money than other people made. We remember how, in 1868, he had written to his brother Orion: "I am in for it now. I must go on chasing [phantoms] until I marry, *then* I am done with literature and all other bosh—that is, literature wherewith to please the general public. I shall write to please myself then." Similarly, in 1899, almost at the other end of the span of his active life, he wrote to Mr. Howells: "For several years I have been intending to stop writing for print as soon as I could afford it. At last I can afford it, and have put the pot-boiler pen away." Those two utterances show us clearly that the artist in him was sufficiently awake at the beginning and at the end of his career to realize, in the one case, that he was not living the creative life, and in the other that he had not lived it—for certainly his marriage had not relieved him from the necessity of pleasing the general public! Between whiles, the creative instinct of the artist had been so supplanted by the acquisitive instinct of the pioneer that he had no conscious sense of control over his life at all: he was not the artist, he was the journalist, the capitalist equally in the fields of business enterprise and of letters.

"If Sam had got that pocket"—we remember the saying of his old California comrade—"he would have remained a pocket-miner to the end of his days." If, indeed, literature had not become for him the equiva-

lent of a gold mine, the only gold mine available on many occasions, would he have continued to write as he did? We know that whenever, as sometimes happened, the repressed spirit of the artist in him raised its head and perceived, if we may say so, the full extent of its *débâcle,* Mark Twain was filled with a despondent desire, a momentary purpose even, to stop writing altogether. "Mama and I," wrote his little daughter Susy, "have both been very much troubled of late because papa, since he had been publishing General Grant's books, has seemed to forget his own books and works entirely; and the other evening, as papa and I were promenading up and down the library, he told me that he didn't expect to write but one more book, and then he was ready to give up work altogether, die, or do anything." Certainly he would never have so neglected, abandoned, his own writing to further the literary fortunes of General Grant, a task that almost any one might have done quite as well, if in his own writing he had been experiencing the normal flow of the creative life: he had thrown himself so eagerly into the publishing business precisely because his creative instinct had been thwarted. We have just seen what he said to Mr. Howells: "For several years I have been intending to stop writing for print as soon as I could afford it": of the "Connecticut Yankee" he writes elsewhere: "It's my swan-song, my retirement from literature permanently." He always found a certain pleasure in writing even when he was writing at his worst, and yet we can see that the artist in him would gladly have put a stop to this ironical career, if it had not had another aspect, a more practical aspect, that appealed to his dominant self. "From the very beginning Mark Twain's home always meant more to him than his work": which is simply another way of saying that that gregarious pioneer, that comrade and emulator of politicians and magnates who was Mrs. Clemens's husband, found ample

reason to continue his literary life for the sake of the material rewards it brought him.

How completely, in a word, Mark Twain had adopted the prevailing point of view of the industrial epoch! How completely, in him, during those middle years, the poet was submerged in the pioneer! Much as he praised men of letters like Howells, his real admiration and respect went out to the "strong, silent men" of money like H. H. Rogers. One recalls the hesitation with which he, "the Lincoln of our literature," as Mr. Howells calls him, presumed to offer compliments to General Grant on the literary quality of his Memoirs: "I was as much surprised as Columbus's cook could have been to learn that Columbus wanted his opinion as to how Columbus was doing his navigating." There is decidedly more than a personal humility in that, there is all the pioneer's contempt for the word as against the deed, an ingrained contempt for the creative life as against the life of sagacious action. And this was deeply characteristic of Mark Twain. He was always for the Bacons as opposed to the Shakespeares; in his private memoranda he does not conceal a certain disdain for Jesus Christ in comparison with Marcus Aurelius and the Stoics, and the indignant passion of his defense of Harriet Shelley, to mention an allied instance, is hardly qualified by any regard for her husband. Finally, writer as he was, his enthusiasm for literature was as nothing beside his enthusiasm for machinery: he had fully accepted the illusion of his contemporaries that the progress of machinery was identical with the progress of humanity. Hear what he writes to his brother on one of the several occasions when the Paige Typesetting Machine seemed to be finished: "Dear Orion—At 12:20 this afternoon a line of movable types was spaced and justified by machinery, for the first time in the history of the world: and I was there to see. It was done *automatically*—instantly—perfectly. This is indeed the

first line of movable types that ever *was* perfectly spaced and perfectly justified on this earth. All the witnesses made written record of the immense historical birth . . . and also set down the hour and the minute. Nobody had drank anything, and yet everybody seemed drunk. Well—dizzy, stupefied, stunned. . . . All the other wonderful inventions of the human brain sink pretty nearly into commonplaces contrasted with this awful mechanical miracle.'' It is one ex-printer writing to another: how wonderful that machine must have seemed to a man whose hands remembered the grubby labor of the old village type-case! But then, Mark Twain was fifty-four years old at this time and those memories were very far away, too far away—as even his financial interest was too shallow, after all—to account for this emotion, before one of the innumerable mechanical miracles of the nineteenth century, of respect, of reverence, of awe-struck wonder. How far, we ask ourselves, how far had not Mark Twain become, in order to experience that emotion in the presence of a piece of machinery, something no longer himself but the embodiment of the whole industrial epoch? It is enough to note how capable he was of the elevations of religion, and what it was that caused those elevations in him. It was not literature. Paige, the inventor of this machine, he called ''a poet, a most great and genuine poet, whose sublime creations are written in steel'': which leaves little to be said about the poets who write in mere words. And, in fact, on the occasion of Walt Whitman's seventieth birthday, Mark Twain expressed, in a way, his opinion of such people. He congratulated the poet for having lived in an age that had witnessed, among other benefactions, ''the amazing, infinitely varied and innumerable products of coal-tar''; he neglected to congratulate the age for having produced Walt Whitman.

## CHAPTER VII

### THE PLAYBOY IN LETTERS

"How can great minds be produced in a country where the test of a great mind is agreeing in the opinions of small minds?"
JOHN STUART MILL.

WE have now watched the gradual building up and the final flowering in Mark Twain of the personality which his mother, his wife, all America indeed, had, so to speak, wished upon him. It came into existence, we recall, that personality, through his mother's ruthless opposition to the poet in him, through the shock of his father's death; and every influence he had encountered in life had confirmed him in the pursuit of opulent respectability. We have seen, however, that this was not the real Mark Twain, this money-making, success-loving, wire-pulling Philistine; it was a sort of dissociated self, the race-character, which had risen in him with the stoppage of his true individuality. The real Mark Twain had been arrested in his development, the artist had remained rudimentary; and this is the Mark Twain we have to consider now. "What a child he was," says Mr. Paine, "always, to the very end!" It was this childishness which caused and which explains his lack of spiritual independence as a man and which accounts for the character of his work as a writer.

"What a child he was!" Glance, in the first place, at that famous temperament of his. Perhaps the best impression we have of it is one written by his friend Joseph Twitchell in a letter from Switzerland where they were tramping together in 1878. Mark Twain was

forty-three at the time. "Mark is a queer fellow," says Twitchell. "There is nothing that he so delights in as a swift, strong stream. You can hardly get him to leave one when once he is within the influence of its fascinations. To throw in stones and sticks seems to afford him rapture. To-night, as we were on our way back to the hotel, seeing a lot of driftwood by the torrent side below the path, I climbed down and threw it in. When I got back to the path Mark was running down-stream after it as hard as he could go, throwing up his hands and shouting in the wildest ecstacy, and when a piece went over a fall and emerged to view in the foam below he would jump up and down and yell. He said afterward that he hadn't been so excited in three months. He acted just like a boy." And observe what he said of himself in "The Turning-Point of My Life": "By temperament I was the kind of person that *does* things. Does them and reflects afterward. So I started for the Amazon without reflecting and without asking any questions. That was more than fifty years ago. In all that time my temperament has not changed, by even a shade. I have been punished many and many a time, and bitterly, for doing things and reflecting afterward, but these tortures have been of no value to me: I still do the thing commanded by Circumstance and Temperament, and reflect afterward." One could hardly ask for a more perfect definition of immaturity.

Then there was his boyish passion for make-believe, his inclination for gorgeous trappings and medieval splendor, what Mr. Paine calls "the fullness of his love for theatrical effect." We know how he enjoyed dressing up for the children's charades, how he revelled in the costumes of "The Prince and the Pauper." His lifelong delight in showing off had the same origin. Mr. Paine tells how in Washington once, when they were staying at the Willard Hotel, supposing that Clemens would like to go down to dinner with as little

ostentation as possible he took him by an elevator that entered the dining-room directly and without stopping at the long corridor known as Peacock Alley. When they reached the dining-room, however, Clemens inquired, "Isn't there another entrance to this place?" and hearing that there was, a very conspicuous one, he added, "Let's go back and try it over." "So," says Mr. Paine, "we went back up the elevator, walked to the other end of the hotel, and came down to the F Street entrance. There is a fine stately flight of steps—a really royal stair—leading from this entrance down into Peacock Alley. To slowly descend that flight is an impressive thing to do. It is like descending the steps of a throne-room, or to some royal landing-place where Cleopatra's barge might lie. I confess that I was somewhat nervous at the awfulness of the occasion, but I reflected that I was powerfully protected; so side by side, both in full-dress, white ties, white silk waistcoats, and all, we came down that regal flight. Of course he was seized upon at once by a lot of feminine admirers, and the passage along the corridor was a perpetual gantlet. I realize now that this gave the dramatic finish to his day, and furnished him with proper appetite for his dinner." All the actors in the world may protest that they would do the same thing: the motive is none the less for that an adolescent one. When Mark Twain marvelled at the court costumes of the Indian princes at Oxford, when he said he had been particularly anxious to see the Oxford pageant in order to get ideas for his funeral procession, which he was "planning on a large scale," when he remarked, "If I had been an ancient Briton, I would not have contented myself with blue paint, but I would have bankrupted the rainbow," was he not, at sixty, at seventy, just, or rather still, Tom Sawyer?

Then there was his sense of proportion, or rather his lack of any sense of proportion, his rudimentary judg-

ment. I shall say nothing here of his truly dazzling display of this in matters of business. But did not Mark Twain, who was supposed to understand his own countrymen, foretell that within a generation after his death America would be a monarchy, a literal monarchy, not merely a citadel of economic reaction? Did he not affirm with all conviction that the Christian Scientists would so increase and multiply that in forty years they would dominate our political life? There are certainly at this time Western cities where that has occurred, but Mark Twain, the hardy prophet, seems never to have glimpsed the nascent forces into whose control the political and economic future seems really bound to pass. In all the years of his traveling to and fro through Europe he divined hardly one of the social tendencies that had so spectacular a *dénouement* within four years of his death. In Austria, where he spent so much time at the turning of the century, he was dazzled by the pomp of the assassinated empress's funeral—"this murder," he writes, with the fatuity of a school boy, "will still be talked of and described and painted a thousand years from now"; but what did he make of that memorable clash he witnessed in the Reichsrath between the Czech and the German deputies? All history was involved in that, as any one can see now, as a discerning man might almost have seen then. In Mark Twain's "Stirring Times in Austria" it is scarcely anything but a meaningless brawl. He does not make comic copy of it, he reports it with all gravity, but he understands nothing of it—indeed he freely says so. It was this same childish incuriosity regarding the nature and causes of the human drama, this same rudimentary cultural sense, that led him always instinctively to think of history, for instance, just as boys of ten used to think of it, as a succession of kings, that led him into that reckless use of superlatives wherever his interest happened to be engaged. He assured Mr. Paine that

the news of somebody's "discovery" of the Baconian authorship of Shakespeare's plays would reach him by cable wherever he was, that "the world would quake with it"; and he said, without any qualification whatever, that the premature end of the Russian-Japanese war was "entitled to rank as the most conspicuous disaster in political history."

And quite on a par with his reckless juvenility of judgment was Mark Twain's level of reflection. The jottings from his note-books that Mr. Paine has published consist mainly of mere childlike observations of sheer fact or expressions of personal animus. His remarks on social, political and economic subjects are precisely of the sort one would expect from what is called the average man: "Communism is idiocy," for example. "They want to divide up the property. Suppose they did it. It requires brains to keep money as well as to make it. In a precious little while the money would be back in the former owner's hands and the communist would be poor again. The division would have to be remade every three years or it would do the communist no good." Is that the sort of exploded platitude one looks for from a famous man of letters? Imagine a French or an English writer of rank, even of the most conservative color, committing to paper an opinion so utterly unphilosophical! One would say that Mark Twain had never thought at all.

And then, most significant of all, there was his undeveloped æsthetic sense. "Mark Twain," says his biographer, "was never artistic, in the common acceptance of that term; neither his art nor his tastes were of an 'artistic' kind." But such distinctions lose their meaning an inch below the surface. Every one is "artistic": Mark Twain, like the majority of people, was merely rudimentarily so. His humorous acknowledgment of this fact is, of course, well known; all the world remembers how he said that in Bayreuth he felt

like "a heretic in heaven":—"Well," he adds, in "The Shrine of St. Wagner," "I ought to have recognized the sign—the old, sure sign that has never failed me in matters of art. Whenever I enjoy anything in art it means that it is mighty poor. The private knowledge of this fact has saved me from going to pieces with enthusiasm in front of many and many a chromo." What did he like? In painting, Landseer—"and the way he makes animals absolute flesh and blood—insomuch that if the room were darkened ever so little and a motionless living animal placed beside a painted one, no man could tell which was which." In music, the Jubilee Singers: "Away back in the beginning—to my mind—their music made all other vocal music cheap; and that early notion is emphasized now. . . . It moves me infinitely more than any other music can. I think that in the jubilees and their songs America has produced the perfectest flower of the ages." In poetry, Kipling—"I guess he's just about my level." In earlier years, we are told, an ancient favorite called "The Burial of Moses" became for him "a sort of literary touchstone," and this general order of taste remained his to the end. There was a moment when he read Browning, a rage that Mr. Paine finds unaccountable, though we can perhaps attribute it to the fun he had in puzzling it all out; he had a lifelong passion for Omar Khayyam, but that was half a matter of rhythm and half a matter of doctrine; he had a sanguinary encounter with Flaubert's "Salammbô," which he didn't like, "any of it": otherwise his chosen reading was wholly non-æsthetic. He "detested" novels, in particular: "I never could stand Meredith and most of the other celebrities," he said, inclusively. He called Warfield's "The Music Master" as "permanent" as Jefferson's "Rip Van Winkle," as, for that matter, it was: indeed, he seems to have taken a general passive pleasure in all the popular plays and stories of all the seasons.

The positive note in his taste, then, was the delight in sonorous sound, with haunting suggestions of mossy marble and Thanatopsianism—in short, that sense of swinging rhythm which is the most primitive form of æsthetic emotion, combined with just those tints of sentiment, by turns mortuary and super-masculine, which are characteristic of an Anglo-Saxon adolescence.

Now all these traits of an arrested development correspond with the mental processes we find at work in Mark Twain's literary life. In his lack of pride, of sustained interest, in his work, of artistic self-determination and self-control, in his laziness and loose extravagance one finds all the signs of the impatient novice who becomes gradually the unwilling novice, without ever growing up to the art of letters at all. Finally, as we shall see, the books he wrote with love, the books in which he really expressed himself and achieved a measure of greatness, were books of, and chiefly for, children, books in which his own juvenility freely registered itself.

"Papa has done a great deal in his life that is good and very remarkable," wrote little Susy Clemens, when she was fourteen years old, "but I think if he had had the advantages with which he could have developed the gifts which he has made no use of in writing his books . . . he could have done more than he has, and a great deal more, even."

I should like to point out that there is more discernment in the fragmentary notes of this little girl than in anything else that has been published about Mark Twain. Susy Clemens was a born psychologist; she was always troubled about her father; she seems indeed to have been the only one of his family, his associates, to conjecture in her dim, childish way that his spirit was at odds with itself, that a worm perhaps, for she could never have said what or why, lay at the root of that abounding temperament. When she set down this note

her father was in the full glory of his mid-career; wealth and fame were rolling in upon him and tides of praise from all the world. He was on a pinnacle of happiness, indulging to the full that reckless prodigality, spiritual and material, in which he found his chief delight. Mr. Howells, Twitchell, those who watched over him, fell, like so many children themselves, into that mood of a spendthrift adolescence. Was his house always full of carpenters and decorators, adapting it to some wider scheme of splendid living? Was there no limit to that lavish hospitality? Was his life constantly broken by business activities, by trips to Canada, by the hundred and one demands that are laid upon an energetic man of affairs? Not one of his friends seems ever to have guessed that he was missing his destiny. Some years ago Mr. Howells reprinted the long series of his reviews of Mark Twain's books; admirable comments as they often are from a literary point of view, there is not the slightest indication in them of any sense of the story of a human soul. His little daughter alone seems to have divined that story, and she was troubled. Something told her what these full-grown men of letters and religion never guessed, that this extravagant playboy was squandering not his possessions but himself, scattering to the winds the resources nature had committed to him; and she alone knew perhaps that somehow, sometime, he would have to pay for it.

Indeed, for it is not yet the time to deal with consequences, was there ever anything like the loose prodigality of Mark Twain's mind? "His mental Niagara," says Mr. Paine, "was always pouring away." It was, and without any sort of discrimination, any sort of control. He tossed off as the small change of anecdote thousands of stories any dozen of which would have made the fortune of another popular writer: stories fell from his hand like cards strewn upon the ground. We have seen how innumerable were the side activities into

which he poured the energy he was unable to use in his writing. In his writing alone his energy was superabundant to such a degree that he never really knew what he was doing: his energy was the master, and he was merely the scribe.

Unused, half-used, misused—was ever anything like that energy? Mr. Paine tells of his "piling up hundreds of manuscript pages only because his brain was thronging as with a myriad of fireflies, a swarm of darting, flashing ideas demanding release." He was always throwing himself away upon some trifle, stumbling over himself, as it were, because the end he had actually focussed was so absurdly inadequate to the means he couldn't help lavishing upon it. There was "A Double-Barrelled Detective Story," for instance: it suggests an elephant trying to play with a pea. What is the story, after all, but a sort of gigantic burlesque on "Sherlock Holmes"? That is the obscure intention, unless I am mistaken; Mark Twain wants to show you how simple it is to turn these little tricks of the story-teller's trade. And what is the final result? A total defeat. "Sherlock Holmes" emerges from the contest as securely the victor as a living gnat perched upon the nose of a dead lion. And then there were those vast quantities of letters, twenty, thirty, forty pages long, which he is said to have written to Mr. Howells. "I am writing to you," he remarks, in one that has been published, "not because I have anything to say, but because you don't have to answer and I need something to do this afternoon." Mark Twain's letters are not good letters just because of this lack of economy. His mind does not play over things with that instinctive check and balance that makes good gossip: it merely opens the sluice and lets nature tumble through, in all its meaningless abundance. That was Mark Twain's way. Think of the plans he conceived and never carried out, even the

fraction of them that we have record of, the "multitude of discarded manuscripts" Mr. Paine mentions now and then: three bulky manuscripts about Satan, a diary of Shem in Noah's ark, "3000 Years Among the Microbes," a burlesque manual of etiquette, a story about life in the interior of an iceberg, "Hell-Fire Hotchkiss," "Huck Finn and Tom Sawyer Among the Indians," another book about Huck and Tom half written in 1897, a third book begun after his return to Missouri in 1902, a ghastly tale about an undertaker's love-affair which did not pass the family censor—"somehow he could never tell the difference," the story of a dubious miraculous conception in Arkansas, "The Autobiography of a Damn Fool," "The Mysterious Chamber," the "1002nd Arabian Night," in which Scheherezade was finally to talk the Sultan to death—how many others were there? It was always hit-or-miss with Mark Twain. That large, loose, ignorant way he had of talking in later years, so meticulous in his statistics, so exceedingly fallible in his social intuitions—how like so many other elderly Americans of our day who have lived lives of authority!—was it not characteristic of his whole career? That vast flow, that vast fog of promiscuous talk—was it garrulous, was it not rather phosphorescent, swarming with glinting fragments of an undeveloped genius, like space itself, with all the stars of space, following some dim orbit perhaps, but beyond the certain consciousness, outside the feeblest control, of any mortal mind?

An undeveloped genius, an undeveloped artistic faculty—could there be a surer sign of it than this lack of inner control? What we observe in all this prodigal and chaotic display of energy is the natural phenomenon who has not acquired the characteristics of the artist at all, those two supreme characteristics, especially, upon which Rodin so insisted in his writings—

patience and conscience, characteristics which Puritanism has monopolized for the moral life, but which are of the essence of all art.

Patience, conscience, economy, self-knowledge, all those humble traits of the wise and sober workingman which every mature artist is—where shall we look for them in Mark Twain's record? "I don't know that I can write a play that will play," he says, in a letter from Vienna in 1898; "but no matter, I'll write half a dozen that won't, anyway. Dear me, I didn't know there was such fun in it. I'll write twenty that won't play." This fumbling, frantic child of sixty-three has forgotten that years before he had been convinced, and with every reason, that write a play he could not. And hear him again: "I have begun twenty magazine articles and books—and flung every one of them aside in turn." Is this a young apprentice, impatiently trying out the different aspects of a talent about which he is still in the dark? No, it is a veteran of letters, who has been writing books for thirty years and who, far from attempting new and difficult experiments in his craft, lacks nothing but the perseverance to carry out some trivial undertaking on an old and well-tried pattern. It is true that on this occasion his debts had interfered and taken the spirit out of his work; nevertheless, those months in Vienna whose tale he tells were almost typical of his life. He appears habitually to have had five or six books going at once which he found it almost impossible to finish; there were always swarms of beginnings, but his impulse seldom carried him through. This was true even of the writing of those books in which, as one might suppose, he was most happily expressing himself. He groaned over "Life on the Mississippi" and only drove himself on in order to fulfill an absurd contract that Mark Twain the writer had made with Mark Twain the publisher. And, strangest of all, as it would seem if we did not know how little

his wife approved of the book, there was "Huckleberry Finn." This man who had experienced a "consuming interest and delight" in the composition of a play which Mr. Paine calls "a dreary, absurd, impossible performance"—no doubt because he had been able to write the whole of it, three hundred pages, in forty-two hours by the clock, only by a sort of chance, it appears, finished his one masterpiece at all. He wrote it fitfully, during a period of eight years, his interest waxing and waning but never holding out, till at last he succeeded in pushing it into the home stretch. Indeed, he seems to have been all but incapable of absorption. The most engrossing idea he ever had was probably that of the "Connecticut Yankee," a book at least more ambitious than any other he attempted. But even the demoniac possession of that, for it was demoniac, suffered a swift interruption. Hardly was he immersed in it when he rushed out again in a sudden sally. It was in defense of General Grant's English style, and the red rag this time was the grammatical peccability of Matthew Arnold.

In all this capricious, distracted, uncertain, spasmodic effort we observe the desperate amateur, driven back again and again by a sudden desire, by necessity, by a hundred impulsions to a task which he cannot master, which fascinates him and yet, to speak paradoxically, fails to interest him. Nothing is more significant than this total lack of sustained interest in his work—his lack of interest in literature itself, for that matter. In all his books, in all the endless pages of his life and letters, there is scarcely a hint of any concern with the technique, or indeed with any other aspect, of what was nothing else, surely, than his art. I have just noted the general character of his æsthetic taste: he was well satisfied with it, he was undisturbed by æsthetic curiosity. He said he "detested" novels; in general, he seems to have read none but those of Mr. Howells, his

father confessor in literature. He told more than once how, at a London dinner-table, Mrs. Clemens had been "tortured" to have to admit to Stepniak that he had never read Balzac, Thackeray "and the others"; he said that his brother had tried to get him to read Dickens and that, although he was ashamed, he could not do it: he had read only, and that several times, "A Tale of Two Cities," because, we may assume, its theme is the French Revolution, in which he had an abiding interest. An animal repugnance to Jane Austen, an irritated schoolboy's dislike of Scott and Cooper—is not that the measure of the literary criticism he has left us? But here again there was a positive note—his lifelong preoccupation with grammar. How many essays and speeches, introductions and extravaganzas by Mark Twain turn upon some question whose interest is purely or mainly verbal!—"English as She Is Taught," "A Simplified Alphabet," "The Awful German Language," "A Majestic Literary Fossil," "Fenimore Cooper's Literary Offenses," "Italian with Grammar," "William Dean Howells," "General Grant and Matthew Arnold," "The New Guide of the Conversation in Portuguese and English." It is the letter-perfection of Mr. Howells that dazzles him; the want of it he considers a sufficient reason for saying "you're another" to Matthew Arnold and tripping him up over some imaginary verbal gaucherie. He is indignant with Cooper for calling women "females": indignation was Mark Twain's habitual attitude toward the modes of the past; and foreign languages never ceased to be infinitely ludicrous to him just because they weren't English. These are all signs of the young schoolboy who has begun to take a pride in his first compositions and who has become suddenly aware of words; and I suggest that Mark Twain never reached the point of being more at home in the language of civilization than that. His preoccupation with letter-perfection is thrown into a

significant light by the style of "Huckleberry Finn." If the beauty and the greatness of that book spring from the joyous freedom of the author, is it not because, in throwing off the bonds of the bourgeois society whose mold he had been obliged to take, he was reverting not only to a frame of mind he had essentially never outgrown, but to a native idiom as well?

Mark Twain has told us again and again that in all vital matters a man is the product of his training. If we wanted further proof that his taste was simply rudimentary we might observe that it developed in some slight measure, though very slightly and inconclusively, the "training" having come too late. Mr. Paine tells us, for example, that twelve years after the pilgrimage of "The Innocents Abroad," he found the new, bright copies of the old masters no longer an improvement on the originals, although he still did not care for the originals. Indeed, if we wish to understand the reason for the barbarous contempt he displays, obtrusively in his earlier work, for the historic memorials of the human spirit in Europe, we have only to turn to the postscript of "The Innocents Abroad" itself. "We were at home in Palestine," says Mark Twain. "It was easy to see that that was the grand feature of the expedition. We had cared nothing much about Europe. We galloped through the Louvre, the Pitti, the Uffizi, the Vatican—all the galleries. . . . We examined modern and ancient statuary with a critical eye in Florence, Rome, or anywhere we found it, and praised it if we saw fit, and if we didn't we said we preferred the wooden Indians in front of the cigar stores of America. But the Holy Land brought out all our enthusiasm. We fell into raptures by the barren shores of Galilee; we pondered at Tabor and at Nazareth. . . . Yes, the pilgrimage part of the excursion was its pet feature—there is no question about that." Why? Why were Paris and Rome nothing to Mark Twain but the material

for an indifferent, a hostile persiflage, while Jerusalem was "full of poetry, sublimity, and, more than all, dignity"? It was because the only education he had known was that "Hebraic" education which led Matthew Arnold to say that the American people of his time were simply the English middle class transplanted. "To 'fear God and dread the Sunday School,'" he wrote to Mr. Howells once, "exactly described that old feeling which I used to have." But had he ever outgrown this fear and dread? Had not his wife and all those other narrow, puritanical influences to which he had subjected himself simply taken the place of the Sunday School in his mind? "Tom Sawyer Abroad," which he wrote quite late in life, is an old-fashioned Western country "Sunday School scholar's" romantic dream of the "land of Egypt"—Tom Sawyer's "abroad" doesn't include Europe at all; and we have seen that Mark Twain's general attitude as a European tourist remained always that of the uninitiated American business man. His attention had been fixed in his childhood upon the civilization of the Biblical lands, and that is why they seemed to him so full of poetry and dignity; his attention had never been fixed upon the civilization of Europe, and that is why it seemed to him so empty and absurd. Faced with these cultural phenomena, he reverted all his life to the attitude which had been established in him in his boyhood and had been confirmed by all the forces that had arrested his development beyond that stage.

How, then, are we to describe Mark Twain's literary character? Mr. Paine speaks of his genius as "given rather to elaboration than to construction"; he says that "most of his characters reflected intimate personalities of his early life"; he refers to "two of his chief gifts—transcription and portrayal," adding that "he was always greater at these things than at invention." Are not these traits, which are indisputable, the traits

of a mind that has never attained to creation in the proper sense, a mind that has stopped short of the actual process of art? As we run over the list of his books we see that the majority of them, including virtually all his good work, were not even creative in design but rather reminiscent, descriptive, autobiographical or historical: "The Innocents Abroad," "Roughing It," "A Tramp Abroad," "Following the Equator," "Joan of Arc," "Huckleberry Finn," "Tom Sawyer," "Life on the Mississippi." It was as a pilot on the river, he said, that he had learned to know human nature and the world. But had he assimilated what he learned? When, in later days, he turned back upon his life for literary material, it was not this great period that rose in his mind, save for the merely descriptive work of "Life on the Mississippi"—and even there it is the river itself and not its human nature that comes most insistently before us; it was his boyhood in Hannibal. Mark Twain remembered, indeed, the marvelous gallery of American types the Mississippi had spread before him, but it had never become his for art: his imagination had never attained the mastery over that variegated world of men. That his spirit had, in fact, been closed to experience is indicated in Mr. Paine's statement that "most of his characters reflected intimate personalities of his early life"; he has sketched a few portraits in outline, a few caricatures, but the only characters he is able to conceive realistically are boys. In "The Gilded Age" alone, in the sole character of Laura Hawkins, one can fairly say, he handles the material of real life with the novelist's intention, and what a character, what a love-story, hers is! "It is a long story: unfortunately, it is an old story, and it need not be dwelt upon," he says of Laura's seduction, with a prudent eye for the refined sensibilities of those ladies of Hartford under whose surveillance the book was written. It was a fortunate

thing that Mark Twain did not attempt to dwell upon it: he would have had his task showing in detail how the fair and virginal Laura became the "consummate artist in passion" he says she did! He turns Laura into a Jezebel because, it is perfectly plain, the moral prepossessions of Hartford having been transgressed in her person, it was the popular melodramatic thing to do. He was both afraid and unable to present her character truly, and, in consequence, too impatient, too indifferent, too little interested, even to attempt it. We have here the conclusive, the typical, illustration of his failure as a creative artist. His original submission to the taboos of his environment had prevented him from assimilating life: consequently, he was prevented as much by his own immaturity as by fear of public opinion from ever attempting seriously to recreate it in his imagination.

We can best describe Mark Twain, therefore, as an improvisator, a spirit with none of the inner control, none of the self-determination of the artist, who composed extempore, as it were, and at the solicitation of influences external to himself. It is remarkable how many of his ideas are developments of "news items" floating about in his journalist's imagination, items like the Siamese Twins and the Tichborne case. Except for the ever-recurring themes of Huck and Tom, one would say that his own spirit never prompted his imagination at all; certainly his own spirit never controlled it. His books are without form and without development; they tell themselves, their author never holds the reins—a fact he naïvely confesses in the preface of "Those Extraordinary Twins": "Before the book was half finished those three were taking things almost entirely into their own hands and working the whole tale as a private venture of their own." Moreover, he depended upon outside stimulus, not to quicken his mental machinery merely, but actually to set it going. When, in later

life, he wrote that man is "moved, directed, commanded by exterior influences solely," he was simply describing his personal experience.

Glance at his record once more. What led him to undertake the voyage that resulted in "The Innocents Abroad"? Chiefly the advice of Anson Burlingame. After publishing "The Innocents Abroad," we are told, "he had begun early in the year to talk about another book, but nothing had come of it beyond a project or two, more or less hazy and unpursued." It was only when his publisher came forward and suggested that he should write a book about his travels and experiences in the Far West that he set to work at the composition of "Roughing It." The presence and stimulus of his friend Twitchell enabled him to write "A Tramp Abroad": we know this from the fact that he undertook a subsequent journey down the Rhone with the express purpose of writing another book which, because, as he repeatedly said, Twitchell was not with him, resulted in nothing but "a state of coma" and a thousand chaotic notes he never used. In 1874 we find him again waiting for the impulse that seems hardly ever to have come from within: his wife and Howells urge him to write for the *Atlantic* and it is only then that fresh memories rise in his mind and he begins "Life on the Mississippi." In 1878, the demand for a new Mark Twain book of travel was "an added reason for going to Europe again." The chief motive that roused him to the composition of "A Connecticut Yankee" seems to have been to provide an adequate mouthful for the yawning jaws of his own publishing business. And even "Huckleberry Finn," if we are to believe Mr. Paine, was not spontaneously born: "He had received from somewhere new afflatus for the story of Huck and Tom, and was working on it steadily." This absence in him of the proud, instinctive autonomy of the artist is illustrated in another trait also. How overjoyed he

was when he could get Mr. Howells to read his proofs for him, the proofs even of the books he had written for love! And how willing he was to have those proofs mauled and slashed! "His proof-sheets came back to *The Atlantic,*" says Mr. Howells, "each a veritable 'mush of concession,' as Emerson says": and before he had finished "Life on the Mississippi" he set his publisher to work editing it, with the consequence, he writes, that "large areas of it are condemned here and there and yonder."

Here, I think, we approach the secret of Mark Twain's notorious "laziness." Mr. Paine assures us that he was not lazy in the ordinary sense of the word: "that he detested manual labor is true enough, but at the work for which he was fitted and intended it may be set down here on authority (and despite his own frequent assertions to the contrary) that to his last year he was the most industrious of men." Very well, but what are we to say of that "languor" of his, that love of "the loose luxury of undress and the comfort of pillows" which grew upon him, especially in later years, when he received his company propped up in bed in that gorgeous Persian dressing-gown, that "state of coma and lazy comfort and solid happiness" into which he was always drifting, that indolence which, aside from his incessant billiard-playing, led him to spend "most" of a summer in mid-life playing ten-pins? Much of it, no doubt, was a pose: it was a way of protesting to the public and his matter-of-fact friends that if he was engaged in a pursuit as altogether useless as that of literature, at least he wasn't taking it too seriously. That accounts for what Mr. Paine calls his "frequent assertions to the contrary." But part of this lax mood was involuntary, and is not to be attributed to his Southern temperament; it was the sign that he was essentially unemployed, it was the flapping as it were of those great sails the wind had never filled.

There he was, a man, with all the powers and energies of a man, living the irresponsible life of a boy; there he was, an artist, a potential artist, living the life of a journalist; everything he did was a hundred times too easy for him; the goal he had set himself, the goal that had been set for him, was so low that it not only failed to enlist his real forces but actually obliged him to live slackly. He was thus a sort of individual analogy to the capitalist régime which, as Mr. Veblen describes it, is capable of reaping its profits only by maintaining throughout the industrial system in general a certain "incapacity by advisement." And in order to spare himself in his own eyes he convinced himself that this laziness was predestined. Mr. Paine's biography opens with these words: "On page 492 of the old volume of Seutonius, which Mark Twain read until his very last day, there is a reference to one Flavius Clemens, a man of wide repute 'for his want of energy,' and in a marginal note he has written: 'I guess this is where our line starts.'" If people are lazy, one imagines him saying to himself, it may sometimes be their own fault. But who can blame the man who is "born lazy," the man who is descended from a lazy line?

It is only as a result of the stoppage of his creative life that we can explain also the endless distractions to which his literary career was subject. "I came here," he writes from London as early as 1872, "to take notes for a book, but I haven't done much but attend dinners and make speeches." That innocent *réclame* of his, that irresistible passion for the limelight which was forever drawing off the forces that ought to have been invested in his work, was due largely, no doubt, to his inordinate desire for approval, for self-corroboration. But if his heart had been in his work would he have courted so many interruptions? For court them he did: he invited, he brought upon himself a mode of living that made work almost impossible. "I don't really get anything

done worth speaking of," he writes in 1881, "except during the three or four months that we are away in the summer. . . . I keep three or four books on the stocks all the time, but I seldom add a satisfactory chapter to one of them." Was Mrs. Clemens to blame? We are distinctly told that she was dazed, that she was appalled, at the extravagant manner of living into which the household had drifted. Mark Twain's vast energy had flowed into this channel of the opulent householder because it had not been able to find free expression in his work, and the happier he was in that rôle the more irksome his work became. "Maybe you think I am not happy?" he writes. "The very thing that gravels me is that I am. I don't want to be happy when I can't work. I am resolved that hereafter I won't be." And at that brilliant apogee of his life, when his daughter noted that he had just become interested in "mind-cure," he took up his writing quarters in the billiard-room where, perfect witness that he was to the truth of Herbert Spencer's old saw about billiard-playing and a misspent youth, he was ready at all hours to receive his friends and impress them into the game, where, indeed, he could almost count on the pleasure of being interrupted. He, whose literary work had become a mere appanage of his domestic life, whose writing went by fits and starts, and who certainly took no pains to keep himself in form for it, had such a passion for billiards that he would play all night and "stay till the last man gave out from sheer exhaustion."

For all his exuberance, in short, he was not, on the whole, happy in his work; almost from the beginning of his career we note in him an increasing distaste for this literary journalism which he would hardly have experienced if he had not been intended for quite another life. We remember that cry of distress when he was setting out on the *Quaker City* excursion, that

cry which must have seemed so fantastically meaningless to those who read his letter: "I am so worthless that it seems to me I never do anything or accomplish anything that lingers in my mind as a pleasant memory. . . . An accusing conscience gives me peace only in excitement and restless moving from place to place." What was it but the conscience of the artist in him, lulled into a fitful sleep by the applause of all America before it had ever been able quite to penetrate into the upper layers of his mind? Mr. Paine has noted the change in tone between the first and second parts of "Life on the Mississippi," written with an interval of twelve years, the change from "art" to "industry," the difference "between the labors of love and duty": he avers that the second half might have been as glamorous as the first if Mark Twain had revisited the river eight or ten years earlier, "before he had become a theoretical pessimist, and before the river itself had become a background for pessimism." Mr. Paine would have his task explaining, in that connection, the difference between "theoretical" pessimism and pessimism of the other sort! For it was just so between "The Innocents Abroad" and "A Tramp Abroad"; it was even more so between "A Tramp Abroad" and "Following the Equator": "In the 'Tramp,'" says Mr. Paine, "he has still the sense of humor, but he has become a cynic; restrained, but a cynic none the less." All that descriptive writing in which alone, perhaps, he could count upon an absolutely certain financial success—how repellant it became to him as time went on! Watch him guilefully trying to wriggle out of the self-imposed task of "A Tramp Abroad." He tells his friend Twitchell that he has lost his Swiss note-book, and, who knows? perhaps he won't have to write the book, after all. Then the note-book comes to light, and he is plunged in gloom: "I was about to write to my publisher and propose some other book, when the con-

founded thing turned up, and down went my heart into my boots." It seemed to him, says Mr. Paine, "that he had been given a life-sentence." And to what does he turn for relief? "The Prince and the Pauper," which he lingers over and cannot bear to finish, telling Mr. Howells that, after that "veritable nightmare" of "A Tramp Abroad," nothing can diminish his jubilant delight in writing it. He is a child among children again, doing a task that almost any gifted child might have done, something that is for him the equivalent of a charade, a pretty game with his little daughters, and basking for the moment in the approval of his wife.

We have seen—and it seems to me the most conclusive proof of his arrested development—that Mark Twain showed not only no respect for literature but no vital, personal pride in his own pursuit of it. What is the true artist's natural attitude toward his work? Henry James, in his finical, exaggerated fashion, expressed it, I think—over-expressed it, in his passionate anxiety not to do so—in something he wrote once of his early tales: "I, of course, really and truly cared for them, as we say, more than for aught else whatever—cared for them with that kind of care, infatuated though it may seem, that makes it bliss for the fond votary never to so much as speak of the loved object, makes it a refinement of piety to perform his rites under cover of a perfect freedom of mind as to everything but them." Compare this with what Mark Twain wrote when he was setting to work at "The American Claimant": "My right arm is nearly disabled with rheumatism, but I am bound to write this book (and sell 100,000 copies of it—no, I mean 1,000,000—next fall). I feel sure I can dictate the book into a phonograph if I don't have to yell." That is only an extreme instance of what appears to have been his habitual attitude toward his work, an attitude of almost cynical indifference, of insolence even.

Once, however, he approached it in quite a different spirit, with a significant and exceptional result that proves the rule. "Though the creative enthusiasm in his other books soon passed," says Mr. Paine, "his glory in the tale of Joan never died": in a note which he made on his seventy-third birthday, indeed, when all his important works lay far behind him, he said: "I like the 'Joan of Arc' best of all my books; and it is the best; I know it perfectly well." Did he really consider it his best book? We shall see presently that in this, as in other matters, his judgment was quite unstable, quite unreliable, quite immature; and certainly, beside "Huckleberry Finn" and "Tom Sawyer," no one else can take very seriously a work that is, for all its charm, scarcely anything but a literary chromo. Why, then, did Mark Twain look back upon it with such a unique satisfaction? It was because he had had no ulterior object in view in writing it, because, for once, in this book, he had approached his work in the spirit, at least, of the artist and the craftsman. "Possibly," we find him writing to a friend, and how exceptional the phrase is on Mark Twain's pen!—"possibly the book may not sell, but that is nothing—it was written for love." But more striking still is the testimony of a later note: "It furnished me seven times the pleasure afforded me by any of the others: twelve years of preparation and two years of writing. The others needed no preparation and got none." In other words, in this book alone he had consciously exercised the instinct of workmanship, the instinct he had exercised in that career as a pilot to which he always looked back so regretfully. What if "Huckleberry Finn" was incomparably greater? What if he had for "Tom Sawyer" a peculiar, an intimately proprietary, affection? There he had been simply the "divine amateur," improvising the tale of his own fond memories; and however much he loved them, he took no particular

pride in the writing of them; he never thought of publishing them anonymously, as he published "Joan" at first, lest it should suffer from the obloquy of a pen-name that had been compromised by so many dubious ventures; he readily acquiesced, in fact, in his wife's attitude of indifference toward the always ungrammatical and often improper Odyssey of his own childhood. With "Joan of Arc" it was different: those twelve years of preparation, those two years of writing were the secret of his delight in it, his respect for it. A poor thing but indubitably mine, the spirit of the artist in him seems to be saying—that spirit which came into its own so late and burned so feebly then and was so quickly gutted out. Did he not call it "a book which writes itself, a tale which tells itself: I merely have to hold the pen"? It was indeed only in the dimmest sense a creation; it was nothing but a *réchauffé* for children, for sentimental, grown-up children. Something of his own personality, no doubt, went into it, the animus of a scarcely conscious, an obscurely treasured, ideal of the heroic life. But his pride and his joy in the book sprang, one feels, from a more specific achievement: he had never known so fully before what absorption means, what it means to take pains in all the complicated sense of honest workmanship.

If this explanation is the correct one, it is easy indeed to determine the measure of Mark Twain's maturity, to prove that he was at the same time a born artist and one who never developed beyond the primitive stage. Only once, and with a significant result in his own confession, have we found him working at literature as the artist works. But think of the care he lavished upon lecturing and oral story-telling! He was, says Mr. Howells, "the most consummate public performer I ever saw. . . . On the platform he was the great and finished actor which he probably would not

have been on the stage." And to what was this eminence due?—"his carefully studied effects." This man, who was capable of all but "yelling" his books into a phonograph, approached the platform with all the circumspection of a conscious master: there we find him prudent, prescient, self-respectful, deliberately taking pains, as he shows in one of his letters, to rest and equip himself beforehand. "Unless I get a great deal of rest," he says, and he makes no jokes now about his "laziness," "a ghastly dullness settles down upon me on the platform, and turns my performance into work, and hard work, whereas it ought always to be pastime, recreation, solid enjoyment." There is the voice of the artist, the prompting of the true craftsman's conscience. I have said that he was indifferent to technique, abnormally incurious, in fact, of all the means of the literary art. But who that has read his essay, "How to Tell a Story," will forget the proud skill of the *raconteur* of "The Golden Arm"? Those who imagine that an artist is just an inspired child of nature might well consider the attitude of mind revealed in this little essay. Mark Twain first heard the story of the "Golden Arm" from an old negro to whose cabin he used to resort as a boy in Hannibal; and just as we have seen him reverent in the Holy Land because of the initiation of the Sunday School, so now we see him reverent in art because of the initiation of that first master who had remained, indeed, save for Horace Bixby, the pilot, his only master. To tell that story rightly, to pause just long enough in just the proper places, to enunciate each word with just the accurate emphasis, and at last—oh! so warily, oh! so carefully, so cautiously, with such control, to spring that final effect of horror!—there was something worthy of a man's passionate endeavor! Did not Mark Twain assert again and again, in his old age, that no one can rise above the highest limit attainable through the "outside helps afforded by the ideals, influ-

ences, and training'' of the society into which he is born? Who, in the Gilded Age of America, cared for literature, cared for it enough to celebrate it, to glorify it, to live it? What master in the highest of the arts had Mark Twain ever found comparable in relative authority, in essential authority, with that old negro *raconteur,* that old pilot of the Mississippi? What real criticism, what exacting appreciation had Mark Twain, the writer, ever received? Had not his wife, indifferent to his best work, encouraged him to write puerilities? Had not Howells even, the ''Critical Court of Last Resort in this country,'' praised him as often for his ineptitudes as for his lucky flights of genius? Who had expected anything of him, in short, or put him on his mettle? But at least America understood the primitive art of oral story-telling, at least America had understood the primitive art of the Mississippi pilot: in those two spheres, and in those alone, Mark Twain had found inspiring masters, he had encountered a penetrating criticism, an apt, subtle and thrilling appreciation; in those two spheres he had been invited to pass muster and he had done so! What if he had never read ''Balzac and the others''? That old negro of his childhood, with all his ancient, inherited folk-skill—he was Mark Twain's Balzac, and no young novelist ever more fervently humbled himself before the high priest of his *métier,* ever more passionately drank in the wisdom of the source, ever more proudly rose, by ardent endeavor, to the point where, before going his own way, he could almost do what the high priest himself had done. Mark Twain had never individually ''come into his intellectual consciousness,'' in Mr. Howells's phrase, at all; his creative spirit had remained rudimentary and almost undifferentiated; but that his natural genius was very great is proved once more by the extraordinary zest with which he threw himself into those approximately artistic channels he found open before him.

It was one of Mark Twain's favorite fancies, Mr. Paine says, that life should begin with old age and progress backwards. We can understand it now; we can understand why his mind was essentially retrospective and why so much of his writing deals with his childhood. The autobiographical impulse is normal in old age: when men cannot build on hope they build on memory, their minds regress into the past because they no longer have a future. It is generally understood, therefore, that when people in middle age occupy themselves with their childhood it is because some central instinct in them has been blocked by either internal or external obstacles: their consciousness flows backward until it reaches a period in their memory when life still seemed to them open and fluid with possibilities. Who does not see in the extraordinary number of books about boys and boyhood written by American authors the surest sign of the prevalence of that arrested moral development which is the result of the business life, the universal repression in the American population of all those impulses that conflict with commercial success? So it was with Mark Twain. In him the autobiographical impulse, characteristic of old age, awoke very early: as far back as 1880 we find him "attempting, from time to time," according to Mr. Paine, "an absolutely faithful autobiography"; and he resumed the attempt in 1885, at the time when he was assisting Grant with his Memoirs. It remained his dominant literary impulse. "Earn a character if you can, and if you can't," says Pudd'nhead Wilson, "then assume one." Mark Twain had "assumed" the character of his middle years; he had only truly lived, he had only been himself, as a child, and the experience of childhood was the only experience he had assimilated. That is why he was perpetually recurring to his early life in Hannibal, why the books he wrote *con amore* were books about childhood, and why he instinctively wrote not only

about, but also for, children. By doing so he knew, or something in him knew, what many another American author has known since, that he was capturing the whole public. Ten million business men—that was the public, the masculine public, of Mark Twain's time. And are not business men in general, in a sense not quite intended by the coiner of the phrase, "children of a larger growth"?

Mark Twain, I say, instinctively wrote for children. It is true that he seems often to have believed that "Huckleberry Finn" and "Tom Sawyer" could only be understood and appreciated by mature readers; certainly "Joan of Arc" was put forth as a historical romance for mature readers. But what do we find him saying while he is still at work on "Tom Sawyer"? "I finally concluded to cut the Sunday School speech down to the first two sentences, leaving no suggestion of satire, since the book is to be for boys and girls." And as for "Joan of Arc," with what did he associate it in his own mind? "I am writing," he says in a letter to a publishing friend, "a companion piece to 'The Prince and the Pauper,'" and this, added to the fact that he wrote it in constant, sympathetic consultation with his own children, is the best extrinsic proof of its real character. Written for children, then, more than half consciously, all these books were; and I will not except even "The Mysterious Stranger," permeated as it is with a mood that is purely adolescent, though an old man wrote it and few children probably have ever read it. Written for and written of children all these books were, for it is clear that the protagonists of "The Mysterious Stranger" are the boys through whose eyes the story unfolds itself and who taste its bitterness, and Joan of Arc, seen through the eyes of the Sieur de Conte, is a child also. And these, I say, were the books he wrote with love, with a happiness that sometimes seemed sacred to him. It was this happiness that haloed

the tale of Joan, although Professor Phelps says that in 1904 he spoke of "Huckleberry Finn" as "undoubtedly his best book"; and that he had for "Tom Sawyer" a very special feeling is shown in a letter, one of those famous "unmailed" letters, written in 1887 to a theatrical manager who had dramatized the story and proposed to put it on the stage: "That is a book, dear sir, which cannot be dramatized. One might as well try to dramatize any other hymn. 'Tom Sawyer' is simply a hymn, put into prose form to give it a worldly air." There were plays which he wrote with an exuberant gaiety; but that was the lusty fun of the man of action, the boy who enjoyed throwing sticks into a swift stream: it was not the happiness of the soul in process of delivering itself. That happiness, I say, sanctified these children's books alone—these books that suggest the green, luxuriant shoots clustering on the stump of some gigantic tree which has been felled close to the ground.

## CHAPTER VIII

### THOSE EXTRAORDINARY TWINS

"Joy with us is the monopoly of disreputable characters."
ALEXANDER HARVEY.

AT the circus, no doubt, you have watched some trained lion going through the sad motions of a career to which the tyrannical curiosity of men has constrained him. At times he seems to be playing his part with a certain zest; he has acquired a new set of superficial habits, and you would say that he finds them easy and pleasant. Under the surface, however, he remains the wild, exuberant creature of the jungle. It is only thanks to the eternal vigilance of his trainers and the guiding-lines they provide for him in the shape of the ring, the rack and all the rest of the circus-paraphernalia that he continues to enact this parody of his true life. Have his instincts been modified by the imposition of these new habits? Look at him at the moment when the trainer ceases to crack his whip and turns his back. In a flash another self has possessed him: in his glance, in his furtive gesture you perceive the king of beasts once more. The sawdust of the circus has become the sand of the desert; twenty thousand years have rolled back in the twinkling of an eye.

So it was with Mark Twain. "We have no *real* morals," he wrote in one of his later letters, "but only artificial ones, morals created and preserved by the forced suppression of natural and healthy instincts." Now that is not true of the man who is master of himself. The morality of the free man is not based upon

the suppression of his instincts but upon the discreet employment of them: it is a real and not an artificial morality, therefore, because the whole man subscribes to it. Mark Twain, as we have seen, had conformed to a moral régime in which the profoundest of his instincts could not function: the artist had been submerged in the bourgeois gentleman, the man of business, the respectable Presbyterian citizen. To play his part, therefore, he had to depend upon the cues his wife and his friends gave him. Here we have the explanation of his statement: "Outside influences, outside circumstances, wind the man and regulate him. Left to himself, he wouldn't get regulated at all, and the sort of time he would keep would not be valuable." We can see from this how completely his conscious self had accepted the point of view of his trainers, how fully he had concurred in their desire to repress that unmanageable creative instinct of his, how ashamed, in short, he was of it. Nevertheless, that instinct, while repressed, while unconscious, continued to live and manifest itself just the same. We shall see that in the end, never having been able to develop, to express itself, to fulfill itself, to air itself in the sun and the wind of the world, it turned as it were black and malignant, like some monstrous, morbid inner growth, poisoning Mark Twain's whole spiritual system. We have now to note its constant blind efforts to break through the censorship that had been imposed on it, to cross the threshold of the unconscious and play its part in the conscious life of this man whose will was always enlisted against it.

First of all, a few instances from his everyday life. We know that he was always chafing against the scheme of values, the whole social régime, that was represented by his wife and his friends. His conscious self urged him to maintain these values and this régime. His unconscious self strove against them, vetoed the force behind his will, pushed him in just the opposite

direction. We find this conflict revealed in his story, "Those Extraordinary Twins," about an Italian counterpart of the famous Siamese monstrosity. "Whenever Luigi had possession of the legs, he carried Angelo to balls, rumshops, Sons of Liberty parades, horse races, campaign riots, and everywhere else that could damage him with his party and his church; and when it was Angelo's week he carried Luigi diligently to all manner of moral and religious gatherings, doing his best to regain the ground he had lost." This story of the two incompatible spirits bound together in one flesh is, as we can see, the symbol of Mark Twain himself.

Glance at his business life. He pursued it with frantic eagerness, urged on by the self that loved success, popularity, prestige. Yet he was always in revolt against it. There were years during which he walked the floor at night, "over-wrought and unsettled," as he said, "by apprehensions—badgered, harassed"—and let us add Mr. Paine's adjectives—"worried, impatient, rash, frenzied and altogether upset," till he had to beg the fates for mercy, till he had to send his agent the pathetic, imploring appeal, "Get me out of business!" Why did he always fail in those spectacular ventures of his? Was it not because his will, which was enlisted in business, was not supported by a constant, fundamental desire to succeed in it, because, in fact, his fundamental desire pointed him just the other way?

Then there was his conventional domestic and social life. He had submerged himself in the rôle of the husband, the father, the neighbor, the citizen. At once he became the most absent-minded of men! His absent-mindedness, Mr. Paine assures us, was "by no means a development of old age," and he mentions two typical instances of it when Mark Twain was "in the very heyday of his mental strength." Once, when the house was being cleaned, he failed to recognize the pictures

in his own drawing-room when he found them on the floor, and accused an innocent caller of having brought them there to sell. Plainly the eye of the householder was not confirmed by the instinctive love that makes one observant. The vagrant artist in him, in fact, was always protesting against the lot his other self had so fully accepted, the lot of being "bullyragged," as he said, by builders and architects and tapestry-devils and carpet-idiots and billiard-table-scoundrels and wildcat gardeners when what was really needed was "an incendiary." Moreover, "he was always forgetting engagements," we are told, "or getting them wrong." And this absent-mindedness had its tragic results too, for because of it, to his own everlasting remorse, Mark Twain became the innocent cause of the death of one of his children and only just escaped being the cause of the death of another. On one occasion, he was driving with his year-old son on a snowy day and was so extraordinarily negligent that he let him catch a severe cold which developed into a fatal pneumonia; on the other, when he was out with one of his little daughters, he inadvertently let go of the perambulator and the baby, after a frightful slide down a steep hill, tumbled out, with her head bleeding, among the stones by the roadside. "I should not have been permitted to do it," he said of this first misadventure. "I was not qualified for any such responsibility as that. Some one should have gone who had at least the rudiments of a mind. Necessarily I would lose myself dreaming." Yes, Mark Twain was day-dreaming: that mind in which the filial and paternal instincts had almost supplanted every other caught itself wandering at the critical hour! And in that hour the "old Adam," the natural man, the suppressed poet, registered its tragic protest, took its revenge, against a life that had left no room for it. Truth comes out in the end. The most significant comment on Mark Twain's constant absent-mindedness as regards

domestic matters is to be found in Mr. Paine's record that in his dictations in old age he was extremely inaccurate on every subject except the genesis and writing of his books. We can see from this that although his conscious life had been overwhelmingly occupied with non-artistic and anti-artistic interests, his "heart," as we say, had always been, not in them, but in literature.

And how can we explain the fervor with which this comrade of Presbyterian ministers and pillars of society, this husband of that "heavenly whiteness," Mrs. Clemens, jots in his note-book observations like the following: "We may not doubt that society in heaven consists mainly of undesirable persons"? How can we explain that intemperate, that vehement, that furious obsession of animosity against the novels of Jane Austen except as an indirect venting of his hatred of the primness and priggishness of his own *entourage?* I should go even further, I should be even more specific, than this. Mr. Howells had been Mark Twain's literary mentor; Mr. Howells had "licked him into shape," had regenerated him artistically as his wife had regenerated him socially; Mr. Howells had set his pace for him, and Mark Twain, the candidate for gentility, had been overflowingly grateful. "Possibly," he had written to this father confessor, "possibly you will not be a fully accepted classic until you have been dead one hundred years—it is the fate of the Shakespeares of all genuine professions—but then your books will be as common as Bibles, I believe. In that day, I shall be in the encyclopedias too, thus: 'Mark Twain, history and occupation unknown; but he was personally acquainted with Howells.'" We know, as a matter of fact, that he delighted in the delicacy of Howells's mind and language. But this taste was wholly unrelated to anything else in Mark Twain's literary horizon. We can say, with all the more certainty because he "detested" novels

in general, that if Howells's novels had been written by any one else than his friend and his mentor he would have ignored them as he ignored all other "artistic" writing, he would even have despised them as he despised all insipid writing. In short, this taste was a product of personal affection and gratitude; it was precisely on a par with his attitude toward the provincial social daintinesses of his wife. And in both cases, just in the measure that his conscious self had accepted these alien standards that had been imposed upon him, his unconscious self revolted against them. "I never saw a woman so hard to please," he writes in 1875, "about things she doesn't know anything about." Mr. Paine hastens to assure us that "the reference to his wife's criticism in this is tenderly playful, as always." But what a multitude of dark secrets that tender playfulness covers! Mark Twain's unconscious self barely discloses its claws in phrases like that, enough to show how strict was the censorship he had accepted. It cannot express itself directly; consequently, like a child who, desiring to strike its teacher, stamps upon the floor instead, it pours out its accumulated bitterness obliquely. When Mark Twain utters such characteristic aphorisms as "Heaven for climate, hell for society," we see the repressed artist in him striking out at Mrs. Clemens and the Reverend Joseph Twitchell, whose companionship the dominant Mark Twain called, and with reason, for he seems to have been the most lovable of men, "a companionship which to me stands first after Livy's." Similarly, when he roars and rages against the novels of Jane Austen we can see that buried self taking vengeance upon Mr. Howells, with whom Jane Austen was a prime passion, who had even taken Jane Austen as a model.

We know the constraint to which he submitted as regards religious observances. "And once or twice," he writes, "I smouched a Sunday when the boss wasn't

looking. Nothing is half so good as literature hooked on Sunday, on the sly.'' Does it not explain the bitter animus that lies behind his comical complaint of George W. Cable, when the two were together on a lecture tour? —''You will never, never know, never divine, guess, imagine, how loathsome a thing the Christian religion can be made until you come to know and study Cable daily and hourly. . . . He has taught me to abhor and detest the Sabbath-day and hunt up new and troublesome ways to dishonor it.'' Habitually, as we have seen, he spoke of himself in public as a Presbyterian, as ''Twitchell's parishioner.'' His buried self redressed the balance in a passionate admiration for Robert Ingersoll, the atheist. ''Thank you most heartily for the books,'' he writes to Ingersoll in 1879. ''I am devouring them—they have found a hungry place, and they content it and satisfy it to a miracle.'' What, in fact, were the books he loved best? We find him reading Andrew D. White's ''Science and Religion,'' Lecky's ''European Morals'' and similar books of a rationalistic tendency. But his favorite authors—after Voltaire, whom he had read as a pilot—were Pepys, Seutonius and Saint-Simon. Saint-Simon's ''Memoirs'' he said he had read twenty times, and we gather that he almost learned by heart Seutonius's record of ''the cruelties and licentiousness of imperial Rome.'' Why did he take such passionate pleasure in books of this kind, in writers who had so freely ''spoken out'' Hear what he says in 1904 regarding his own book, ''What Is Man?''—''Am I honest? I give you my word of honor (privately) I am not. For seven years I have suppressed a book which my conscience tells me I ought to publish. I hold it a duty to publish it. There are other difficult tasks I am equal to, but I am not equal to that one.'' And when at last he did publish it, anonymously, it was with this foreword: ''Every thought in them [these papers] has been thought (and

accepted as unassailable truth) by millions upon millions of men—and concealed, kept private. Why did they not speak out? Because they dreaded *(and could not bear)* the disapproval of the people around them. Why have not I published? The same reason has restrained me, I think. I can find no other." There we see, in all its absolutism, the censorship under which his creative self was laboring. One can easily understand his love for Saint-Simon and Casanova and why, in private, he was perpetually praising their "unrestrained frankness."

And is there any other explanation of his "Elizabethan breadth of parlance"? Mr. Howells confesses that he sometimes blushed over Mark Twain's letters, that there were some which, to the very day when he wrote his eulogy on his dead friend, he could not bear to reread. Perhaps if he had not so insisted, in former years, while going over Mark Twain's proofs, upon "having that swearing out in an instant," he would never have had cause to suffer from his having "loosed his bold fancy to stoop on rank suggestion." Mark Twain's verbal Rabelaisianism was obviously the expression of that vital sap which, not having been permitted to inform his work, had been driven inward and left there to ferment. No wonder he was always indulging in orgies of forbidden words. Consider the famous book, "1601," that "fireside conversation in the time of Queen Elizabeth": is there any obsolete verbal indecency in the English language that Mark Twain has not painstakingly resurrected and assembled there? He, whose blood was in constant ferment and who could not contain within the narrow bonds that had been set for him the riotous exuberance of his nature, had to have an escape-valve, and he poured through it a fetid stream of meaningless obscenity—the waste of a priceless psychic material! Mr. Paine speaks of an address he made at a certain "Stomach Club" in Paris which

has "obtained a wide celebrity among the clubs of the world, though no line of it, or even its title, has ever found its way into published literature." And who has not heard one or two of the innumerable Mark Twain anecdotes in the same vein that are current in every New York publishing house?

In all these ways, I say, these blind, indirect, extravagant, wasteful ways, the creative self in Mark Twain constantly strove to break through the censorship his own will had accepted, to cross the threshold of the unconscious. "A literary imp," says Mr. Paine, "was always lying in wait for Mark Twain, the imp of the burlesque, tempting him to do the *outré*, the outlandish, the shocking thing. It was this that Olivia Clemens had to labor hardest against." Well she labored, and well Mark Twain labored with her! It was the spirit of the artist, bent upon upsetting the whole apple-cart of bourgeois conventions. They could, and they did, keep it in check; they arrested it and manhandled it and thrust it back; they shamed it and heaped scorn upon it and prevented it from interfering too much with the respectable tenor of their daily search for prestige and success. They could baffle it and distort it and oblige it to assume ever more complicated and grotesque disguises in order to elude them, but they could not kill it. In ways of which they were unaware it escaped their vigilance and registered itself in a sort of cipher, for us of another generation who have eyes to read, upon the texture of Mark Twain's writings.

For is it not perfectly plain that Mark Twain's books are shot through with all sorts of unconscious revelations of this internal conflict? In the Freudian psychology the dream is an expression of a suppressed wish. In dreams we do what our inner selves desire to do but have been prevented from doing either by the exigencies of our daily routine, or by the obstacles of convention, or by some other form of censorship

which has been imposed upon us, or which we ourselves, actuated by some contrary desire, have willingly accepted. Many other dreams, however, are not so simple: they are often incoherent, nonsensical, absurd. In such cases it is because two opposed wishes, neither of which is fully satisfied, have met one another and resulted in a "compromise"—a compromise that is often as apparently chaotic as the collision of two railway trains running at full speed. These mechanisms, the mechanisms of the "wish-fulfillment" and the "wish-conflict," are evident, as Freud has shown, in many of the phenomena of everyday life. Whenever, for any reason, the censorship is relaxed, the censor is off guard, whenever we are day-dreaming and give way to our idle thoughts, then the unconscious bestirs itself and rises to the surface, gives utterance to those embarrassing slips of the tongue, those "tender playfulnesses," that express our covert intentions, slays our adversaries, sets our fancies wandering in pursuit of all the ideals and all the satisfactions upon which our customary life has stamped its veto. In Mark Twain's books, or rather in a certain group of them, his "fantasies" we can see this process at work. Certain significant obsessions reveal themselves there, certain fixed ideas; the same themes recur again and again. "I am writing from the grave," he notes in later life, regarding some manuscripts that are not to be published until after his death. "On these terms only can a man be approximately frank. He cannot be straightly and unqualifiedly frank either in the grave or out of it." When he wrote "Captain Stormfield's Visit to Heaven," "Pudd'nhead Wilson," "The American Claimant," "Those Extraordinary Twins," he was frank without knowing it. He, the unconscious artist, who, when he wrote his Autobiography, found that he was unable to tell the truth about himself, has conducted us unawares in these writings into the penetralia of his soul.

Let us note, prefatorily, that in each case Mark Twain was peculiarly, for the time being, free of his censorship. That he wrote at least the first draft of "Captain Stormfield" in reckless disregard of it is proved by the fact that for forty years he did not dare to publish the book at all but kept it locked away in his safe. As for "The American Claimant," "Pudd'nhead Wilson," and "Those Extraordinary Twins," he wrote them at the time of the failure of the Paige Typesetting Machine. Shortly before, he had been on the dizziest pinnacle of worldly expectation. Calculating what his returns from the machine were going to be, he had "covered pages," according to Mr. Paine, "with figures that never ran short of millions, and frequently approached the billion mark." Then, suddenly, reduced to virtual bankruptcy, he found himself once more dependent upon authorship for a living. He had passed, in short, through a profound nervous and emotional cataclysm: "so disturbed were his affairs, so disordered was everything," we are told, "that sometimes he felt himself as one walking amid unrealities." At such times, we know, the bars of the spirit fall down; people commit all sorts of aberrations, "go off the handle," as we say; the moral habits of a lifetime give way and man becomes more or less an irresponsible animal. In Mark Twain's case, at least, the result was a violent effort on the part of his suppressed self to assert its supremacy in a propitious moment when that other self, the business man, had proved abysmally weak. That is why these books that marked his return to literature appear to have the quality of nightmares. He has told us in the preface to "Those Extraordinary Twins" that the story had originally been a part of "Pudd'nhead Wilson": he had seen a picture of an Italian monstrosity like the Siamese Twins and had meant to write an extravagant farce about them; but,

he adds, "the story changed itself from a farce to a tragedy while I was going along with it—a most embarrassing circumstance." Eventually, he realized that it was "not one story but two stories tangled together" that he was trying to tell, so he removed the twins from "Pudd'nhead Wilson" and printed the two tales separately. That alone shows us the confusion of his mind, the confusion revealed further in "The American Claimant" and in "Pudd'nhead Wilson" as it stands. They are, I say, like nightmares, these books: full of passionate conviction that turns into a burlesque of itself, angry satire, hysterical humor. They are triple-headed chimeras, in short, that leave the reader's mind in tumult and dismay. The censor has so far relaxed its hold that the unconscious has risen up to the surface: the battle of the two Mark Twains takes place almost in the open, under our very eyes.

Glance now, among these dreams, at a simple example of "wish-fulfillment." When Captain Stormfield arrives in heaven, he is surprised to find that all sorts of people are esteemed among the celestials who have had no esteem at all on earth. Among them is Edward J. Billings of Tennessee. He was a poet during his lifetime, but the Tennessee village folk scoffed at him; they would have none of him, they made cruel sport of him. In heaven things are different; there the celestials recognize the divinity of his spirit, and in token of this Shakespeare and Homer walk backward before him.

Here, as we see, Mark Twain is unconsciously describing the actual fate of his own spirit and that ample other fate his spirit desires. It is the story of Cinderella, the despised step-sister who is vindicated by the prince's favor, rewritten in terms personal to the author. We note the significant parallel that the Tennessee village where the unappreciated poet lived to the

scornful amusement of his neighbors is a duplicate of the village in which Mark Twain had grown up, the milieu of Huck Finn and Tom Sawyer.

This inference is corroborated by the similar plight of Pudd'nhead Wilson, the sardonic philosopher whom we should have identified with Mark Twain even if the latter had not repeatedly assured us that an author draws himself in all his characters, even if we did not know that Pudd'nhead's "calendar" was so far Mark Twain's own calendar that he continued it in two later books, "Following the Equator" and "A Double-Barrelled Detective Story." Pudd'nhead, in short, is simply another Edward J. Billings and the village folk treat him in just the same fashion. "For some years," says the author, "Wilson had been privately at work on a whimsical almanac, for his amusement—a calendar, with a little dab of ostensible philosophy, usually in ironical form, appended to each date, and the Judge thought that these quips and fancies of Wilson's were neatly turned and cute; so he carried a handful of them around one day, and read them to some of the chief citizens. But irony was not for those people; their mental vision was not focussed for it. They read those playful trifles in the solidest earnest and decided without hesitancy that if there ever had been any doubt that Dave Wilson was a pudd'nhead—which there hadn't—this revelation removed that doubt for good and all." And hear how the half-breed Tom Driscoll baits him before all the people in the square: "Dave's just an all-round genius—a genius of the first water, gentlemen; a great scientist running to seed here in this village, a prophet with the kind of honor that prophets generally get at home—for here they don't give shucks for his scientifics, and they call his skull a notion-factory —hey, Dave, ain't it so? . . . Come, Dave, show the gentlemen what an inspired Jack-at-all-science we've got in this town and don't know it." Is it possible to doubt

that here, more than half consciously, Mark Twain was picturing the fate that had, in so real a sense, made a buffoon of him? Hardly, when we consider the vindictive delight with which he pictures Pudd'nhead outmanœuvring the village folk and triumphing over them in the end.

Observe, now, the deadly temperamental earnestness of "The Man That Corrupted Hadleyburg," a story written late in life when his great fame and position enabled him to override the censorship and speak with more or less candor. "The temptation and the downfall of a whole town," says Mr. Paine, "was a colossal idea, a sardonic idea, and it is colossally and sardonically worked out. Human weakness and rotten moral force were never stripped so bare or so mercilessly jeered at in the market-place. For once Mark Twain could hug himself with glee in derision of self-righteousness, knowing that the world would laugh with him, and that none would be so bold as to gainsay his mockery. Probably no one but Mark Twain ever conceived the idea of demoralizing a whole community—of making its 'nineteen leading citizens' ridiculous by leading them into a cheap, glittering temptation, and having them yield and openly perjure themselves at the very moment when their boasted incorruptibility was to amaze the world." It was the "leading citizens," the pillars of society Mark Twain had himself been hobnobbing with all those years, the very people in deference to whom he had suppressed his true opinions, his real desires, who despised him for what he was and admired him only for the success he had attained in spite of it—it was these people, his friends, who had, in so actual a sense, imposed upon him, that he attacks in this terrible story of the passing stranger who took such a vitriolic joy in exposing their pretensions and their hypocrisy. "I passed through your town at a certain time, and received a deep offense which I had not earned. . . . I wanted

to damage every man in the place, and every woman." Is not that the unmistakable voice of the misprized poet and philosopher in Mark Twain, the worm that has turned, the angel that has grown diabolic in a world that has refused to recognize its divinity?

Here, I say, in these two or three instances, we have the "wish-fulfillment" in its clearest form. Elsewhere we find the wish, the desire of the suppressed poet for self-effectuation, expressing itself in many vague hopes and vague regrets. It is the sentiment of the suppressed poet in all of us that he voices in his letter to Howells about the latter's novel, "Indian Summer"—saying that it gives a body "a cloudy sense of his having been a prince, once, in some enchanted, far-off land, and of being an exile now, and desolate—and Lord, no chance ever to get back there again!" And consider the unfinished tale of "The Mysterious Chamber," "the story," as Mr. Paine describes it, "of a young lover who is accidentally locked behind a secret door in an old castle and cannot announce himself. He wanders at last down into subterranean passages beneath the castle, and he lives in this isolation for twenty years." There is something inescapably personal about that. As for the character of the Colonel Sellers of "The American Claimant"—so different from the Colonel Sellers of "The Gilded Age," who is supposed to be the same man and whom Mark Twain had drawn after one of his uncles—every one has noted that it is a burlesque upon his own preposterous business life. Isn't it more than this? That rightful claimant to the great title of nobility, living in exile among those fantastic dreams of wealth that always deceive him—isn't he the obscure projection of the lost heir in Mark Twain himself, inept in the business life he is living, incapable of substantiating his claim, and yet forever beguiled by the hope that some day he is going to win his true rank and live the life he was intended for? The

shadowy claim of Mark Twain's mother's family to an English earldom is not sufficient to account for his constant preoccupation with this idea.

Just before Mark Twain's death, he recalled, says Mr. Paine, "one of his old subjects, Dual Personality, and discussed various instances that flitted through his mind —Jekyll and Hyde phases in literature and fact." One of his old subjects, Dual Personality! Could he ever have been aware of the extent to which his writings revealed that conflict in himself? Why was he so obsessed by journalistic facts like the Siamese Twins and the Tichborne case, with its theme of the lost heir and the usurper? Why is it that the idea of changelings in the cradle perpetually haunted his mind, as we can see from "Puddn'head Wilson" and "The Gilded Age" and the variation of it that constitutes "The Prince and the Pauper"? The prince who has submerged himself in the rôle of the beggar-boy—Mark Twain has drawn himself there, just as he has drawn himself in the "William Wilson" theme of "The Facts Concerning the Recent Carnival of Crime in Connecticut," where he ends by dramatically slaying the conscience that torments him. And as for that pair of incompatibles bound together in one flesh—the Extraordinary Twins, the "good" boy who has followed the injunctions of his mother and the "bad" boy of whom society disapproves—how many of Mark Twain's stories and anecdotes turn upon that same theme, that same juxtaposition!—does he not reveal there, in all its nakedness, as I have said, the true history of his life?

We have observed that in Pudd'nhead's aphorisms Mark Twain was expressing his true opinions, the opinions of the cynic he had become owing to the suppression and the constant curdling as it were of the poet in him. While his pioneer self was singing the praises of American progress and writing "A Connecticut Yankee at the Court of King Arthur," the disappointed poet

kept up a refrain like this: "October 12, the discovery. It was wonderful to find America, but it would have been more wonderful to lose it." In all this group of writings we have been discussing, however, we can see that while the censorship had been sufficiently relaxed in the general confusion of his life to permit his unconscious to rise to the surface, it was still vigilant enough to cloak its real intentions. It is in secret that Pudd'nhead jots down his saturnine philosophy; it is only in secret, in a private diary like Pudd'nhead's, that young Lord Berkeley, in "The American Claimant," thinks of recording his views of this fraudulent democracy where "prosperity and position constitute rank." Here, as in the malevolent, Mephistophelian "passing stranger" of "The Man That Corrupted Hadleyburg," Mark Twain frankly images himself. But he does so, we perceive, only by taking cover behind a device that enables him to save his face and make good his retreat. Pudd'nhead is only a crack-brained fool about things in general, even if he is pretty clever with his finger-print invention—otherwise he would find something better to do than to spend his time writing nonsense; and as for Lord Berkeley, how could you expect a young English snob to know anything about democracy? That was the reaction upon which Mark Twain could safely count in his readers; they would only be fooling themselves, of course, they would know that they were fooling themselves: but in order to keep up the great American game of bluff they would have to forgive *him!* As long as he never hit below the belt by speaking in his own person, in short, he was perfectly secure. And Mark Twain, the humorist, who held the public in the hollow of his hand, knew it.

It is only after some such explanation as this that we can understand the supremacy among all Mark Twain's writings of "Huckleberry Finn." Through the character of Huck, that disreputable, illiterate little

boy, as Mrs. Clemens no doubt thought him, he was licensed to let himself go. We have seen how indifferent his sponsors were to the writing and the fate of this book: "nobody," says Mr. Paine, "appears to have been especially concerned about Huck, except, possibly, the publisher." The more indifferent they were, the freer was Mark Twain! Anything that little vagabond said might be safely trusted to pass the censor, just because he was a little vagabond, just because, as an irresponsible boy, he could not, in the eyes of the mighty ones of this world, know anything in any case about life, morals and civilization. That Mark Twain was almost, if not quite, conscious of his opportunity we can see from his introductory note to the book: "Persons attempting to find a motive in this narrative will be prosecuted; persons attempting to find a moral in it will be banished; persons attempting to find a plot in it will be shot." He feels so secure of himself that he can actually challenge the censor to accuse him of having a motive! Huck's illiteracy, Huck's disreputableness and general outrageousness are so many shields behind which Mark Twain can let all the cats out of the bag with impunity. He must, I say, have had a certain sense of his unusual security when he wrote some of the more cynically satirical passages of the book, when he permitted Colonel Sherburn to taunt the mob, when he drew that picture of the audience who had been taken in by the Duke proceeding to sell the rest of their townspeople, when he has the King put up the notice, "Ladies and Children not Admitted," and add: "There, if that line don't fetch them, I don't know Arkansaw!" The withering contempt for humankind expressed in these episodes was of the sort that Mark Twain expressed more and more openly, as time went on, in his own person; but he was not indulging in that costly kind of cynicism in the days when he wrote "Huckleberry Finn." He must, therefore, have appreciated the

license that little vagabond, like the puppet on the lap of a ventriloquist, afforded him. This, however, was only a trivial detail in his general sense of happy expansion, of ecstatic liberation. "Other places do seem so cramped up and smothery, but a raft don't," says Huck, on the river; "you feel mighty free and easy and comfortable on a raft." Mark Twain himself was free at last!—that raft and that river to him were something more than mere material facts. His whole unconscious life, the pent-up river of his own soul, had burst its bonds and rushed forth, a joyous torrent! Do we need any other explanation of the abandon, the beauty, the eternal freshness of "Huckleberry Finn"? Perhaps we can say that a lifetime of moral slavery and repression was not too much to pay for it. Certainly, if it flies like a gay, bright, shining arrow through the tepid atmosphere of American literature, it is because of the straining of the bow, the tautness of the string, that gave it its momentum.

Yes, if we did not know, if we did not feel, that Mark Twain was intended for a vastly greater destiny, for the rôle of a demiurge, in fact, we might have been glad of all those petty restrictions and misprisions he had undergone, restrictions that had prepared the way for this joyous release. No smoking on Sundays! No "swearing" allowed! Neckties having to be bothered over! That everlasting diet of Ps and Qs, petty Ps and pettier Qs, to which Mark Twain had had to submit, the domestic diet of Mrs. Clemens, the literary diet of Mr. Howells, those second parents who had taken the place of his first—we have to thank it, after all, for the vengeful solace we find in the promiscuous and general revolt of Huckleberry Finn:

"Don't talk about it, Tom. I've tried it and it don't work; it don't work, Tom. It ain't for me; I ain't used to it. The widder's good to me, and friendly; but I can't stand them ways. She makes me git up just at the same time every morning; she

makes me wash, they comb me all to thunder; she won't let me sleep in the woodshed; I got to wear them blamed clothes that just smothers me, Tom; they don't seem to any air git through 'em, somehow; and they're so rotten nice that I can't set down, nor lay down, nor roll around anywher's; I hain't slid on a cellar door for—well, it 'pears to be years; I got to go to church and sweat and sweat—I hate them ornery sermons! I can't ketch a fly in there, I can't chaw, I got to wear shoes all Sunday. The widder eats by a bell; she goes to bed by a bell; she gits up by a bell—everything's so awful reg'lar a body can't stand it."

"Well, everybody does that way, Huck."

"Tom, it don't make no difference. I ain't everybody, and I can't *stand* it. It's awful to be tied up so. And grub comes too easy. I don't take no interest in vittles, that way. I got to ask to go a-fishing; I got to ask to go in a-swimming—dern'd if I hain't got to ask to do everything. Well, I'd got to talk so nice it wasn't no comfort—I'd got to go up in the attic and rip out a while, every day, to git a taste in my mouth, or I'd a died, Tom. The widder wouldn't let me smoke; she wouldn't let me yell, she wouldn't let me gape, nor stretch, nor scratch, before folks. . . . I *had* to shove, Tom—I just had to. . . . Now these clothes suits me, and this bar'l suits me, and I ain't ever going to shake 'em any more. . . ."

This chapter began with the analogy of the lion in the circus. You see what happens with Mark Twain when the trainer turns his back.

## CHAPTER IX

### MARK TWAIN'S HUMOR

"To be good is noble; but to show others how to be good is nobler and less trouble."

*Pudd'nhead Wilson's New Calendar.*

AND now we are ready for Mark Twain's humor. We recall how reluctant Mark Twain was to adopt the humorist's career and how, all his life, he was in revolt against a rôle which, as he vaguely felt, had been thrust upon him: that he considered it necessary to publish his "Joan of Arc" anonymously is only one of many proofs of a lifelong sense that Mark Twain was an unworthy double of Samuel Langhorne Clemens. His humorous writing he regarded as something external to himself, as something other than artistic self-expression; and it was in consequence of pursuing it, we have divined, that he was arrested in his moral and esthetic development. We have seen, on the other hand, that he adopted this career because his humor was the only writing he did in Nevada that found an appreciative audience and that the immediate result of his decision was that he obtained from the American public the prodigious and permanent approval which his own craving for success and prestige had driven him to seek. Here, then, are the facts our discussion of Mark Twain's humor will have to explain. We must see what that humor was, and what produced it, and why in following it he violated his own nature and at the same time achieved such ample material rewards.

It was in Nevada and California that Mark Twain's humor, of which we have evidences during the whole of his adolescence, came to the front; and it is a notable fact that almost every man of a literary tendency who was brought into contact with those pioneer conditions became a humorist. The "funny man" was one of the outstanding pioneer types; he was, indeed, virtually the sole representative of the Republic of Letters in the old West. Artemus Ward, Orpheus C. Ker, Petroleum V. Nasby, Dan de Quille, Captain Jack Downing, even Bret Harte, sufficiently remind us of this fact. Plainly, pioneer life had a sort of chemical effect on the creative mind, instantly giving it a humorous cast. Plainly, also, the humorist was a type that pioneer society required in order to maintain its psychic equilibrium. Mr. Paine seems to have divined this in his description of Western humor. "It is a distinct product," he says. "It grew out of a distinct condition—the battle with the frontier. The fight was so desperate, to take it seriously was to surrender. Women laughed that they might not weep; men, when they could no longer swear. 'Western humor' was the result. It is the freshest, wildest humor in the world, but there is tragedy behind it."

Perhaps we can best surprise the secret of this humor by noting Mark Twain's instinctive reaction to the life in Nevada. It is evident that in many ways, and in spite of his high spirits and high hopes, he found that life profoundly repugnant to him: he constantly confesses in his diary and letters, indeed, to the misery it involves. "I do *hate* to go back to the Washoe," he writes, after a few weeks of respite from mining. "We fag ourselves completely out every day." He describes Nevada as a place where the devil would feel homesick: "I heard a gentleman say, the other day, that it was the 'd——dest country under the sun'—and that comprehensive conception I fully subscribe to. It never

rains here, and the dew never falls. No flowers grow here, and no green thing gladdens the eye. . . . Our city lies in the midst of a desert of the purest—most unadulterated and uncompromising—*sand.*" And as with the setting—so with the life. "High-strung and neurotic," says Mr. Paine, "the strain of newspaper work and the tumult of the Comstock had told on him": more than once he found it necessary—this young man of twenty-eight—"to drop all work and rest for a time at Steamboat Springs, a place near Virginia City, where there were boiling springs and steaming fissures in the mountain-side, and a comfortable hotel." That he found the pace in California just as difficult we have his own testimony; with what fervor he speaks of the "d——n San Francisco style of wearing out life," the "careworn or eager, anxious faces" that made his brief escape to the Sandwich Islands—"God, what a contrast with California and the Washoe"!—ever sweet and blessed in his memory. Never, in short, was a man more rasped by any social situation than was this young "barbarian," as people have called him, by what people also call the free life of the West. We can see this in his profanity, which also, like his humor, came to the front in Nevada and remained one of his prominent characteristics through life. We remember how "mad" he was, "clear through," over the famous highway robbery episode: he was always half-seriously threatening to kill people; he threatened to kill his best friend, Jim Gillis. "To hear him denounce a thing," says Mr. Paine, "was to give one the fierce, searching delight of galvanic waves"; naturally, therefore, no one in Virginia, according to one of the Gillis brothers, could "resist the temptation of making Sam swear." Naturally; but from all this we observe that Mark Twain was living in a state of chronic nervous exasperation.

Was this not due to the extraordinary number of repressions the life of pioneering involved? It is true

that it was, in one sense, a free life. It was an irresponsible life, it implied a break with civilization, with domestic, religious and political ties. Nothing could be freer in that sense than the society of the gold-seekers in Nevada and California as we find it pictured in "Roughing It." Free as that society was, nevertheless, scarcely any normal instinct could have been expressed or satisfied in it. The pioneers were not primitive men, they were civilized men, often of gentle birth and education, men for whom civilization had implied many restraints, of course, but innumerable avenues also of social and personal expression and activity to which their natures were accustomed. In escaping responsibility, therefore, they had only placed themselves in a position where their instincts were blocked on every side. There were so few women among them, for instance, that their sexual lives were either starved or debased; and children were as rare as the "Luck" of Roaring Camp, a story that shows how hysterical, in consequence of these and similar conditions, the mining population was. Those who were accustomed to the exercise of complex tastes and preferences found themselves obliged to conform to a single monotonous routine. There were criminal elements among them, too, which kept them continually on their guard, and at best they were so diverse in origin that any real community of feeling among them was virtually impossible. In becoming pioneers they had, as Mr. Paine says, to accept a common mold; they were obliged to abdicate their individuality, to conceal their differences and their personal pretensions under the mask of a rough good-fellowship that found expression mainly in the nervously and emotionally devastating terms of the saloon, the brothel and the gambling-hell. Mark Twain has described for us the "gallant host" which peopled this hectic scene, that army of "erect, bright-eyed, quick-moving, strong-handed young giants—the very pick

and choice of the world's glorious ones." Where are they now? he asks in "Roughing It." "Scattered to the ends of the earth, or prematurely aged or decrepit —or shot or stabbed in street affrays—or dead of disappointed hopes and broken hearts—all gone, or nearly all, victims devoted upon the altar of the golden calf." We could not have a more conclusive proof of the total atrophy of human nature this old Nevada life entailed.

Innumerable repressions, I say, produced the fierce intensity of that life, which burnt itself out so quickly. We can see this, indeed, in the fact that it was marked by an incessant series of eruptions. The gold-seekers had come of their own volition, they had to maintain an outward equilibrium, they were sworn, as it were, to a conspiracy of masculine silence regarding these repressions, of which, in fact, in the intensity of their mania, they were scarcely aware. Nevertheless, the human organism will not submit to such conditions without registering one protest after another; accordingly, we find that in the mining-camps the practical joke was, as Mr. Paine says, "legal tender," profanity was almost the normal language, and murder was committed at all hours of the day and night. Mark Twain tells how, in Virginia City, murders were so common that they were scarcely worth more than a line or two in the newspaper, and "almost every man" in the town, according to one of his old friends, "had fought with pistols either impromptu or premeditated duels." We have just noted that for Mark Twain this life was a life of chronic nervous exasperation. Can we not say now that, in a lesser degree, it was a life of chronic nervous exasperation for all the pioneers?

But why? What do we mean when we speak of repressions? We mean that individuality, the whole complex of personal desires, tastes and preferences, is inhibited from expressing itself, from registering itself. The situation of the pioneers was an impossible one,

but, victims as they were of their own thirst for gold, they could not withdraw from it; and their masculine pride prevented them even from openly complaining or criticising it. In this respect, as I have already pointed out, their position was precisely parallel to that of soldiers in the trenches. And, like the soldiers in the trenches, they were always on the verge of laughter, which philosophers generally agree in calling a relief from restraint.

We are now in a position to understand why all the writers who were subjected to these conditions became humorists. The creative mind is the most sensitive mind, the most highly individualized, the most complicated in its range of desires: consequently, in circumstances where individuality cannot register itself, it undergoes the most general and the most painful repression. The more imaginative a man was the more he would naturally feel himself restrained and chafed by such a life as that of the gold-seekers. He, like his comrades, was under the necessity of making money, of succeeding—the same impulse had brought him there that had brought every one else; we know how deeply Mark Twain was under this obligation, an obligation that prevented him from attempting to pursue the artistic life directly because it was despised and because to have done so would have required just those expressions of individuality that pioneer life rendered impossible. On the other hand, sensitive as he was, he instinctively recoiled from violence of all kinds and was thus inhibited by his own nature from obtaining those outlets in "practical jokes," impromptu duels and murder to which his companions constantly resorted. Mr. Paine tells us that Mark Twain never "cared for" duels and "discouraged" them, and that he "seldom indulged physically" in practical jokes. In point of fact, he abhorred them. "When grown-up people indulge in practical jokes," he wrote, forty years

later, in his Autobiography, "the fact gauges them. They have lived narrow, obscure and ignorant lives, and at full manhood they still retain and cherish a job-lot of left-over standards and ideals that would have been discarded with their boyhood if they had then moved out into the world and a broader life. There were many practical jokers in the new Territory." After all those years he had not outgrown his instinctive resentment against the assaults to which his dignity had had to submit! To Mark Twain, in short, the life of the gold-fields was a life of almost infinite repression: the fact, as we have seen, that he became a universal butt sufficiently proves how large an area of individuality as it were had to submit to the censorship of public opinion if he was to fulfill his pledge and "make good" in Nevada.

Here we have the psychogenesis of Mark Twain's humor. An outlet of some kind that prodigious energy of his was bound to have, and this outlet, since he had been unable to throw himself whole-heartedly into mining, had to be one which, in some way, however obliquely, expressed the artist in him. That expression, nevertheless, had also to be one which, far from outraging public opinion, would win its emphatic approval. Mark Twain was obliged to remain a "good fellow" in order to succeed, in order to satisfy his inordinate will-to-power; and we have seen how he acquiesced in the suppression of all those manifestations of his individuality—his natural freedom of sentiment, his love of reading, his constant desire for privacy—that struck his comrades as "different" or "superior." His choice of a pen-name, as we have noticed, proves how urgently he felt the need of a "protective coloration" in this society where the writer was a despised type. Too sensitive to relieve himself by horseplay, he had what one might call a preliminary recourse in his profanity, those "scorching, singeing blasts" he was always directing

at his companions, and that this in a measure appeased him we can see from Mr. Paine's remark that his profanity seemed "the safety-valve of his high-pressure intellectual engine. . . . When he had blown off he was always calm, gentle, forgiving and even tender." We can best see his humor, then, precisely as Mr. Paine seems to see it in the phrase, "Men laughed when they could no longer swear"—as the expression, in short, of a psychic stage one step beyond the stage where he could find relief in swearing, as a harmless "moral equivalent," in other words, of those acts of violence which his own sensitiveness and his fear of consequences alike prevented him from committing. By means of ferocious jokes—and most of Mark Twain's early jokes are of a ferocity that will hardly be believed by any one who has not examined them critically—he could vent his hatred of pioneer life and all its conditions, those conditions that were thwarting his creative life; he could, in this vicarious manner, appease the artist in him, while at the same time keeping on the safe side of public opinion, the very act of transforming his aggressions into jokes rendering them innocuous. And what made it a relief to him made it also popular. According to Freud, whose investigations in this field are perhaps the most enlightening we have, the pleasurable effect of humor consists in affording "an economy of expenditure in feeling." It requires an infinitely smaller psychic effort to expel one's spleen in a verbal joke than in a practical joke or a murder, the common method among the pioneers, and it is infinitely safer, too!—a fact that instantly explains the function of the humorist in pioneer society and the immense success of Mark Twain. By means of those jokes of his—("men were killed every week," says Mr. Paine, of one little contest of wit in which he engaged, "for milder things than the editors had spoken each of the other")—his comrades were able, without transgressing the law and

the conventions, to vent their own exasperation with the conditions of their life and all the mutual hatred and the destructive desires buried under the attitude of good-fellowship that was imposed by the exigencies of their work. As for Mark Twain himself, the protective coloration that had originally enabled him to maintain his standing in pioneer society ended by giving him the position which he craved, the position of an acknowledged leader.

For, as I have said, Mark Twain's early humor was of a singular ferocity. The very titles of his Western sketches reveal their general character: "The Dutch Nick Massacre," "A New Crime," "Lionizing Murderers," "The Killing of Julius Cæsar 'Localized'," "Cannibalism in the Cars"; he is obsessed with the figure of the undertaker and his labors, and it would be a worthy task for some zealous aspirant for the doctor's degree to enumerate the occasions when Mark Twain uses the phrase "I brained him on the spot" or some equivalent. "If the desire to kill and the opportunity to kill came always together," says Pudd'nhead Wilson, expressing Mark Twain's own frequent mood, "who would escape hanging?" His early humor, in short, was almost wholly aggressive. It began with a series of hoaxes, "usually intended," says Mr. Paine, "as a special punishment of some particular individual or paper or locality; but victims were gathered wholesale in their seductive web." He was "unsparing in his ridicule of the Governor, the officials in general, the legislative members, and of individual citizens." He became known, in fact, as "a sort of general censor," and the officials, the corrupt officials—we gather that they were all corrupt, except his own painfully honest brother Orion—were frankly afraid of him. "He was very far," said one of his later friends, "from being one who tried in any way to make himself popular." To be

sure he was! He was very far even from trying to be a humorist!

Do we not recall the early youth of that most unhumorous soul Henrik Ibsen, who, as an apothecary's apprentice in a little provincial town, found it impossible, as he wrote afterward, "to give expression to all that fermented in me except by mad, riotous pranks, which brought down upon me the ill-will of all the respectable citizens, who could not enter into that world which I was wrestling with alone"? Any young man with a highly developed individuality would have reacted in the same way; Mark Twain had committed the same "mad, riotous pranks" in his own childhood, and with the same effect upon the respectable citizens of Hannibal: if he had been as conscious as Ibsen and had not been obliged by that old pledge to his mother to make terms with his environment, his antagonism would have ultimately taken the form, not of humor, but of satire also. For it began as satire. He had the courage of the kindest of hearts, the humanest of souls: to that extent the poet was awake in him. His attacks on corrupt officials were no more vehement than his pleas on behalf of the despised Chinese, who were cuffed and maltreated and swindled by the Californians. In these attacks and these pleas alike he was venting the humane desires of the pioneers themselves: that is the secret of his "daily philippics." San Francisco was "weltering in corruption" and the settlers instinctively loathed this condition of things almost as much as did Mark Twain himself. They could not seriously undertake to reform it, however, because this corruption was an inevitable part of a social situation that made their own adventure, their own success as gambling miners, possible. The desire to change things, to reform things was checked in the individual by a counter-desire for unlimited material success that

throve on the very moral and political disorder against which all but his acquisitive instincts rebelled. In short, had Mark Twain been permitted too long to express his indignation directly in the form of satire, it would have led sooner or later to a reorientation of society that would have put an end to the conditions under which the miners flourished, not indeed as human beings, but as seekers of wealth. Consequently, while they admired Mark Twain's vehemence and felt themselves relieved through it—a relief they expressed in their "storms of laughter and applause," they could not, beyond a certain point, permit it. Mark Twain, as we know, had been compelled to leave Nevada to escape the legal consequences of a duel. He had gone to San Francisco, where he had immediately engaged in such a campaign of "muck-raking" that the officials "found means," as Mr. Paine says, "of making the writer's life there difficult and comfortless." As a matter of fact, "only one of the several severe articles he wrote criticising officials and institutions seems to have appeared," the result being that he lost all interest in his work on the San Francisco papers. When, on the other hand, he wrote about San Francisco as a correspondent for his paper in the rival community in Nevada, it was, we are told, "with all the fierceness of a flaming indignation long restrained." His impulse, his desire, we see, was not that of the "humorist"; it was that of the satirist; but whether in Nevada or in California he was prohibited, on pain of social extinction, from expressing himself directly regarding the life about him. Satire, in short, had become for him as impossible as murder: he was obliged to remain a humorist.

In an old pamphlet about Mark Twain published in the eighties I discover the report of a phrenologist, one "Professor Beall" of Cincinnati, who found the trait of secretiveness very strongly indicated in the diameter of his head just above the ears. Such testi-

mony, I suppose, has no value; but it is surely significant that this gentleman found the same trait exhibited in Mark Twain's "slow, guarded manner of speech." Perhaps we can understand now the famous Mark Twain "drawl," which he had inherited indeed, but which people say he also cultivated. Perhaps we can understand also why it is that half the art of American humor consists in "keeping one's face straight." These humorists! They don't know themselves how much they are concealing; and they would be as surprised as anybody to learn that they are really social revolutionists of a sort who lack the courage to admit it.

Mark Twain, once committed to the pursuit of success, was obliged, as I say, to remain a humorist whether he would or no. When he went East to carry on his journalistic career, the publishers of *The Galaxy,* to which he became a regular contributor, specifically asked him to conduct a "humorous department"; and after the success of "The Innocents Abroad" his publisher Bliss, we find, "especially suggested and emphasized a humorous work—that is to say, a work humorously inclined." We have already seen, in a previous chapter, that whatever was true of the pioneer society on the Pacific Slope was essentially true also of the rest of the American population during the Gilded Age, that the business men of the East were in much the same case as the pioneers of the West. The whole country, as we know, was as thirsty for humor as it was for ice water: Mark Twain's humor fulfilled during its generation a national demand as universal in America as the demand fulfilled in Russia by Dostoievski, in France by Victor Hugo, in England by Dickens. We have at last begun to approach the secret of this interesting fact.

I have spoken of the homogeneity of the American people during the Gilded Age. Mr. Howells has already related this to the phenomenon of Mark Twain's

humor. "We are doubtless," he says, "the most thoroughly homogeneous folk that ever existed as a great nation. In our phrase, we have somehow all 'been there.' When [our humor] mentions hash we smile because we have each somehow known the cheap boarding-house or restaurant; when it alludes to putting up stoves in the fall, each of us feels the grime and rust of the pipes on his hands." We smile *because!* In that "because" we have the whole story of Mark Twain's success. The "cheap boarding-house," where every one has to pretend that he loves all his neighbors, is the scene of many restraints and many irritations; and as for the grime and rust of stove-pipes, that is a sensation very far from pleasant. Sensitive men, constrained by love and duty to indulge in these things, have been known more than once to complain about them and even, if the truth were known, to cry bloody murder. That was Mark Twain's habitual reaction, as we can see from the innumerable sketches in which he wades knee-deep in the blood of chambermaids, barbers, lightning-rod men, watch-makers and other perpetrators of the small harassments of life. Mark Twain was more exasperated by these annoyances of everyday life than most people are, because he was more sensitive; but most people are exasperated by them also, and, as Mr. Howells says, all the American people of Mark Twain's time were exasperated by the same annoyances. They were more civilized individually, in short, than the primitive environment to which they had to submit: and Mark Twain's humor gave them, face to face as they were with these annoyances, the same relief it had given the miners in the West, afforded them, that is to say, the same "economy of expenditure in feeling." We "smile because" that humor shows us that we are all in the same boat; it relieves us from the strain of being unique and solitary sufferers and enables us to murder our tormentors in our imaginations alone,

thus absolving us from the odious necessity of shedding the blood our first impulse prompts us to shed. Mr. Howells says that "we have somehow all 'been there,'" a phrase which he qualifies by adding that the typical American of the last generation was "the man who has risen." The man who has "risen" is the man who has become progressively aware of civilization; and the demands of the typical American of Mark Twain's time, the demands he made upon his environment, had become, *pari passu,* progressively more stringent, while the environment itself remained, perforce, just as barbarous and corrupt and unregenerate and "annoying" as ever. But why perforce? Because it was "good for business"; it was the environment favorable for a régime of commercial exploitation. Wasn't the "man who has risen," the typical American, himself a business man?

Now, we have already seen that this process of "rising in the world," of succeeding in business, is attained only at the cost of an all but complete suppression of individuality. The social effect of the stimulation of the acquisitive instinct in the individual is a general "levelling down," and this is universally conceded to have been characteristic of the epoch of industrial pioneering. The whole nation was practically organized —by a sort of common consent—on the plan of a vast business establishment, under a majority rule inalterably opposed to all the inequalities of differentiation and to a moral and æsthetic development in the individual that would have retarded or compromised the success of the business régime. We can see, therefore, that if Mark Twain's humor was universally popular, it was because it contributed to the efficiency of this business régime, because it helped to maintain the psychic equilibrium of the business man the country over precisely as it had at first helped to maintain the psychic equilibrium of the Western pioneer.

As a matter of fact, Mark Twain has often been called the "business man's writer." In that humor of his, as in no other literature, the "strong, silent man" who is the archtype of the business world, sees an aid rather than a menace to his practical efficiency. But why does he find it an aid and not a menace? Let us put the question the other way and ask why, in other forms of literature, he finds a menace and not an aid? The acquisitive and the creative instincts are, as we know, diametrically opposed, and, as we also know, all manifestations of the creative spirit demand, require, an emotional effort, a psychic coöperation, on the part of the reader or the spectator. This accounts for the business man's proverbial hatred of the artist, a hatred that expresses itself in a contemptuous desire to "shove him off the map." Every sort of spiritual expansion, intellectual interest, emotional freedom implies a retardation of the business man's mental machinery, a retardation of the "strenuous life," the life of pure action: consequently, the business man shuns everything that distracts him, confuses him, stimulates him to think or to feel. Bad for business! On the other hand, he welcomes everything that simplifies his course, everything that helps him to cut short his impulses of admiration, reverence, sympathy, everything that prevents his mind from opening and responding to the complications and the implications of the spiritual and intellectual life. And this is precisely what Mark Twain's humor does. It is just as "irreverent" as the Boston Brahmins thought—and especially irreverent toward them!—when they gave him a seat below the salt: it degrades, "takes down," punctures, ridicules as pretentious and absurd everything of a spiritual, æsthetic and intellectual nature the recognition of which, the participation in which, would retard the smooth and simple operation of the business man's mind. Mark Twain, as we shall presently see, enables the business man to laugh at art, at

antiquity, at chivalry, at beauty and return to his desk with an infinitely intensified conceit in his own worthiness and well-being. That is one aspect of his humor. In another aspect, he releases, in a hundred murderous fantasies of which I have mentioned several, all the spleen which the business life, with its repression of individuality, involves. Finally, in his books about childhood, he enables the reader to become "a boy again, just for a day," to escape from the emotional stress of maturity to a simpler and more primitive moral plane. In all these respects, Mark Twain's humor affords that "economy of expenditure in feeling" which, as we now perceive, the business man requires as much as the pioneer.

Glance, now, at a few examples of Mark Twain's humor: let us see whether they corroborate this argument.

In "A Tramp Abroad" Mark Twain, at the opera in Mannheim, finds himself seated directly behind a young girl:

> How pretty she was, and how sweet she was! I wished she would speak. But evidently she was absorbed in her own thoughts, her own young-girl dreams, and found a dearer pleasure in silence. But she was not dreaming sleepy dreams,—no, she was awake, alive, alert, she could not sit still a moment. She was an enchanting study. Her gown was of a soft white silky stuff that clung to her round young figure like a fish's skin, and it was rippled over with the gracefullest little fringy films of lace; she had deep, tender eyes, with long, curved lashes; and she had peachy cheeks, and a dimpled chin, and such a dear little dewy rosebud of a mouth; and she was so dove-like, so pure, and so gracious, so sweet and bewitching. For long hours I did mightily wish she would speak. And at last she did; the red lips parted, and out leaped her thought,—and with such a guileless and pretty enthusiasm, too: "Auntie, I just *know* I've got five hundred fleas on me!"

This bit of humor is certainly characteristic of its author. What is its tendency, as the psychologists

say? Mark Twain has, one observes, all the normal emotions of a man confronted with a pretty girl: he has them so strongly indeed that he cannot keep his mind on the "business in hand," which happens to be the opera. He finds himself actually, prevented as he is from expressing himself in any direct way, drifting into a rhapsody about her! What does he do then? He suddenly dashes a pailful of ice-water over this beautiful vision of his, cuts it short by a turn of the mind so sharp, so vulgar indeed, that the vision itself evaporates in a sudden jet of acrid steam. That young girl will no longer disturb the reader's thoughts! She has vanished as utterly as a butterfly under a barrel of quicklime. Beauty is undone and trampled in the dust, but the strong, silent business man is enabled to return to his labors with a soul purified of all troubling emotions.

Another example, the famous "œsophagus" hoax in the opening paragraph of "A Double-Barrelled Detective Story":

> It was a crisp and spicy morning in early October. The lilacs and laburnums, lit with the glory-fires of autumn, hung burning and flashing in the upper air, a fairy bridge provided by kind nature for the wingless wild things that have their home in the tree-tops and would visit together; the larch and the pomegranate flung their purple and yellow flames in brilliant broad splashes along the slanting sweep of woodland, the sensuous fragrance of innumerable deciduous flowers rose upon the swooning atmosphere, far in the empty sky a solitary œsophagus slept upon motionless wing; everywhere brooded stillness, serenity, and the peace of God.

We scarcely need Mr. Paine's assurance that "the warm light and luxury of this paragraph are facetious. The careful reader will note that its various accessories are ridiculously associated, and only the most careless reader will accept the œsophagus as a bird." Mark Twain's sole and wilful purpose, one observes, is to disturb the

contemplation of beauty, which requires an emotional effort, to degrade beauty and thus divert the reader's feeling for it.

To degrade beauty, to debase distinction and thus to simplify the life of the man with an eye single to the main chance—that, one would almost say, is the general tendency of Mark Twain's humor. In almost every one of his sallies, as any one can see who examines them, he burns the house down in order to roast his pig—he destroys, that is to say, an entire complex of legitimate pretensions for the sake of puncturing a single sham. And, as a rule, even the "shams" are not shams at all; they are manifestations of just that personal, æsthetic or moral distinction which any but a bourgeois democracy would seek in every way to cherish. Consider, for example, the value assailed in his famous speech on General Grant and his big toe. The effect of Mark Twain's humorous assault on the dignity of General Grant was to reduce him not to the human but to the common level, to puncture the reluctant reverence of the groundlings for the fact of moral elevation itself; and the success of that audacious venture, its success even with General Grant, was the final proof of the universal acquiescence of a race of pioneers in a democratic régime opposed, in the name of business, to the recognition of any superior value in the individual: what made it possible was the fact that Grant himself had gone the way of all flesh and become a business man. The supreme example of Mark Twain's humor in this kind is, however, the "Connecticut Yankee." "It was another of my surreptitious schemes for extinguishing knighthood by making it grotesque and absurd," says the Yankee. "Sir Ozana's saddle was hung about with leather hat-boxes, and every time he overcame a wandering knight he swore him into my service and fitted him with a plug and made him wear it." Mark Twain's contemporaries, Mr. Howells among them,

liked to imagine that in this fashion he was exposing shams and pretensions; but unhappily for this argument knighthood had been long extinct when Mark Twain undertook his doughty attack upon it, and it had no unworthy modern equivalent. To exalt the plug above the plume was a very easy conquest for our humorist; it was for this reason, and not, as Mark Twain imagined, from any snobbish self-sufficiency, that the English public failed to be abashed by the book. In this respect, at least, the "Connecticut Yankee" was an assault, not upon a social institution, but upon the principle of beauty itself, an assault, moreover, in the very name of the shrewd pioneer business man.

How easy it is now to understand the prodigious success of "The Innocents Abroad," appearing as it did precisely at the psychological moment, at the close of the Civil War, at the opening of the epoch of industrial pioneering, in the hour when the life of business had become obligatory upon every American man! How easy it is to understand why it was so generally used as a guidebook by Americans traveling in Europe! Setting out only to ridicule the sentimental pretensions of the author's own pseudo-cultivated fellow-countrymen, it ridiculed in fact everything of which the author's totally uncultivated fellow-countrymen were ignorant, everything for which they wished just such an excuse to be ignorant where knowledge would have contributed to an individual development incompatible with success in business, a knowledge that would have involved an expenditure in thought and feeling altogether too costly for the mind that was fixed upon the main chance. It attacked not only the illegitimate pretensions of the human spirit but the legitimate pretensions also. It expressly made the American business man as good as Titian and a little better: it made him feel that art and history and all the great, elevated, admirable, painful discoveries of humankind were things not worth wast-

ing one's emotions over. Oh, the Holy Land, yes! But the popular Biblical culture of the nineteenth century was notoriously, as Matthew Arnold pointed out, the handmaid of commercial philistinism; and besides, ancient Palestine was hardly a rival, in civilization, of modern America. "I find your people—your best people, I suppose they are—very nice, very intelligent, very pleasant—only talk about Europe," says a traveling Englishman in one of Howells's novels. "They talk about London, and about Paris, and about Rome; there seems to be quite a passion for Italy; but they don't seem interested in their own country. I can't make it out." It was true, true at least of the colonial society of New England; and no doubt Mark Twain's dash of cold water had its salutary effect. The defiant Americanism of "The Innocents Abroad" marked, almost as definitely as Whitman's "Leaves of Grass," the opening of the national consciousness of which every one hopes such great things in the future. But, unlike "Leaves of Grass," having served to open it, it served also to postpone its fruition. Its whole tendency ran precisely counter to Whitman's, in sterilizing, that is to say, instead of promoting, the creative impulses in the individual. It buttressed the feeble confidence of our busy race in a commercial civilization so little capable of commanding the true spiritual allegiance of men that they could not help anxiously enquiring every traveling foreigner's opinion of it. Here we have the measure of its influence both for good and for evil. That influence was good in so far as it helped to concentrate the American mind upon the problems and the destinies of America; it was evil, and it was mainly evil, in so far as it contributed to a national self-complacency, to the prevailing satisfaction of Americans with a banker's paradise in which, as long as it lasts, the true destinies of America will remain unfulfilled.

So much for the nature and the significance of Mark

Twain's humor. I think we can understand now the prodigious practical success it brought him. And are we not already in a position to see why the rôle of humorist was foreign to his nature, why he was reluctant to adopt it, why he always rebelled against it, and why it arrested his own development?

Obviously, in Mark Twain, the making of the humorist was the undoing of the artist. It meant the suppression of his æsthetic desires, the degradation of everything upon which the creative instinct feeds. How can a man everlastingly check his natural impulses without in the end becoming the victim of his own habit?

I have spoken of the "Connecticut Yankee." We know how Mark Twain loved the tales of Sir Thomas Malory: they were to him a lifelong passion and delight. As for "knightly trappings," he adored them: think of his love for gorgeous costumes, of the pleasure he found in dressing up for charades, of the affection with which he wrote "The Prince and the Pauper"! When, therefore, in his valiant endeavor to "extinguish knighthood," he sends Sir Ozana about the country laying violent hands on wandering knights and clapping plug-hats on their heads he is doing something very agreeable, indeed, to the complacent American business man, agreeable to the business man in himself, but in absolute violation of his own spirit. That is why his taste remained infantile, why he continued to adore "knightly trappings" instead of developing to a more advanced æsthetic stage. His feelings for Malory, we are told, was one of "reverence": the reverence which he felt was the complement of the irreverence with which he acted. One cannot degrade the undegradeable: one can actually degrade only oneself, and the result of perpetually "taking things down" is that one remains "down" oneself, and beauty becomes more and more inaccessibly "up." That is why, in the presence of art, Mark Twain always felt, as he said, "like a bar-

keeper in heaven." In destroying what he was constrained to consider the false pretensions of others, he destroyed also the legitimate pretensions of his own soul. Thus his humor, which had originally served him as a protective coloration against the consequences of the creative life, ended by stunting and thwarting that creative life and leaving Mark Twain himself a scarred child.

He had, to the end, the intuition of another sort of humor. "Will a day come," asks Satan, in "The Mysterious Stranger," "when the race will detect the funniness of these juvenilities and laugh at them—and by laughing at them destroy them? For your race, in its poverty, has unquestionably one really effective weapon —laughter. Power, money, persuasion, supplication, persecution—these can lift at a colossal humbug—push it a little—weaken it a little, century by century; but only laughter can blow it to rags and atoms at a blast. . . . As a race, do you ever use it at all? No; you lack sense and the courage." It was satire that he had in mind when he wrote these lines, the great purifying force with which nature had endowed him, but of the use of which his life had deprived him. How many times he confessed that it was he who lacked the "courage"! How many times we have seen that if he lacked the courage it was because, quite literally, he lacked the "sense," the consciousness, that is to say, of his own powers, of his proper function! Satire necessitates, above all, a supreme degree of moral maturity, a supreme sense of proportion, a free individual position. As for Mark Twain, by reacting immediately to every irritating stimulus he had literally sworn and joked away the energy, the indignation, that a free life would have enabled him to store up, the energy that would have made him not the public ventilator that he became but the regenerator he was meant to be. Mr. Paine speaks of his "high-pressure intellectual engine."

Let us follow the metaphor by saying that Mark Twain permitted the steam in his system to escape as fast as it was generated: he permitted it to escape instead of harnessing it till the time was ripe to "blow to rags and atoms" that world of humbug against which he chafed all his life. But he had staked everything upon the dream of happiness; and humor, by affording him an endless series of small assuagements, enabled him to maintain that equilibrium. "I am tired to death all the time," he wrote in 1895, out of the stress of his financial anxieties. With that in mind we can appreciate the unconscious irony in Mr. Paine's comment: "Perhaps, after all, it was his comic outlook on things in general that was his chief life-saver."

## CHAPTER X

### LET SOMEBODY ELSE BEGIN

"No real gentleman will tell the naked truth in the presence of ladies."

*A Double-Barrelled Detective Story.*

I AM persuaded that the future historian of America will find your works as indispensable to him as a French historian finds the political tracts of Voltaire." In these words, which he addressed to Mark Twain himself, Bernard Shaw suggested what was undoubtedly the dominant intention of Mark Twain's genius, the rôle which he was, if one may say so, pledged by nature to fulfill. "He will be remembered," says Mr. Howells, "with the great humorists of all time, with Cervantes, with Swift, or with any others worthy of his company." Voltaire, Cervantes, Swift! It was as a satirist, we perceive, as a spiritual emancipator, that those of his contemporaries who most generously realized him thought of Mark Twain. Did they not, under the spell of that extraordinary personal presence of his, in the magnetism, the radiance of what might be called his temperamental will-to-satire, mistake the wish for the deed?

What is a satirist? A satirist, if I am not mistaken, is one who holds up to the measure of some more or less permanently admirable ideal the inadequacies and the deformities of the society in which he lives. It is Rabelais holding up to the measure of healthy-mindedness the obscurantism of the Middle Ages; it is Molière holding up to the measure on an excellent sociality everything that is eccentric, inelastic, intemperate; it is Voltaire holding up to the measure of the intelligence

the forces of darkness and superstition: it is a criticism of the spirit of one's age, and of the facts in so far as the spirit is embodied in them, dictated by some powerful, personal and supremely conscious reaction against that spirit. If this is true, Mark Twain cannot be called a satirist. Certain of the facts of American life he did undoubtedly satirize. "The state of American society and government his stories and articles present," says Miss Edith Wyatt, "is, broadly speaking, truthfully characteristic of the state of society and government we find now in Chicago, the most murderous and lawless civil community in the world. What is exceptional in our great humorist's view of our national life is not the ruffianism of the existence he describes for us on the Mississippi and elsewhere in the United States, but the fact that he writes the truth about it." Who will deny that this is so? Mark Twain satirizes the facts, or some of the facts, of our social life, he satirizes them vehemently. But when it comes to the spirit of our social life, that is quite another matter. Let us take his own humorous testimony: "The silent, colossal National Lie that is the support and confederate of all the tyrannies and shams and inequalities and unfairnesses that afflict the peoples—that is the one to throw bricks and sermons at. But let us be judicious and let somebody else begin."

It has often been said that Mark Twain "lost his nerve." It ought to be sufficiently clear by this time, however, that he did not lose his nerve, simply because, in reality, he had never found it. He had never, despite Mr. Howells, "come into his intellectual consciousness" at all, he had never come into the consciousness of any ideal that could stand for him as a measure of the society about him. Moreover, he had so involved himself in the whole popular complex of the Gilded Age that he could not strike out in any direction without wounding his wife or his friends, without contravening some

loyalty that had become sacred to him, without destroying the very basis of his happiness. We have seen that he had never risen to the conception of literature as a great impersonal social instrument. An irresponsible child himself, he could not even feel that he had a right to exercise a will-to-satire that violated the wishes of those to whom he had subjected himself. Consequently, instead of satirizing the spirit of his age, he outwardly acquiesced in it and even flattered it.

If anything is certain, however, it is that Mark Twain was intended to be a sort of American Rabelais who would have done, as regards the puritanical commercialism of the Gilded Age, very much what the author of "Pantagruel" did as regards the obsolescent mediævalism of sixteenth-century France. Reading his books and his life one seems to divine his proper character and career embedded in the life of his generation as the bones of a dinosaur are embedded in a prehistoric clay-bank: many of the vertebræ are missing, other parts have crumbled away, we cannot with final certainty identify the portentous creature. But the dimensions help us, the skull, the thigh, the major members are beyond dispute; we feel that we are justified from the evidence in assuming what sort of being we have before us, and our imagination fills out in detail what its appearance must, or rather would, have been.

When we consider how many of Mark Twain's yarns and anecdotes, the small change as it were of his literary life, had for their butt the petty aspects of the tribal morality of America—Sabbath-breaking, the taboos of the Sunday School, the saws of Poor Richard's Almanac, we can see that his birthright was of our age rather than of his own. Hear what he says of "the late Benjamin Franklin": "His maxims were full of animosity toward boys. Nowadays a boy cannot follow out a single natural instinct without tumbling over some of those everlasting aphorisms and hearing from Franklin on

the spot. If he buys two cents' worth of peanuts, his father says, 'Remember what Franklin has said, my son, "A groat a day's a penny a year," ' and the comfort is all gone out of those peanuts." He delights in turning the inherited wisdom of the pioneers into such forms as this: "Never put off till to-morrow what you can do day after to-morrow, just as well." Here we have the note of Huckleberry Finn, who is not so much at war with the tribal morality as impervious to it, as impervious as a child of another epoch. He visits a certain house at night and describes the books he finds piled on the parlor table: "One was 'Pilgrim's Progress,' about a man that left his family, it didn't say why. I read considerable in it now and then. The statements was interesting, but tough." And again, speaking of a family dinner: "Uncle Silas he asked a pretty long blessing over it, but it was worth it; and it didn't cool it a bit, neither, the way I've seen them kind of interruptions do lots of times." One may say that a man in whom the continuity of racial experience is cut as sharply as these passages indicate it was cut in Mark Twain is headed straight for an inferior cynicism; but what is almost destiny for the ordinary man is the satirist's opportunity: if he can recover himself quickly, if he can substitute a new and personal ideal for the racial ideal he has abandoned, that solution of continuity is the making of him. For Mark Twain this was impossible. I have already given many instances of his instinctive revolt against the spirit of his time, moral, religious, political, economic. "My idea of our civilization," he said, freely, in private, "is that it is a shabby poor thing and full of cruelties, vanities, arrogancies, meannesses and hypocrisies. As for the word, I hate the sound of it, for it conveys a lie; and as for the thing itself, I wish it was in hell, where it belongs." And consider this grave conclusion in one of his later letters: "Well, the 19th century made progress—the

first progress in 'ages and ages'—colossal progress. In what? Materialities. Prodigious acquisitions were made in things which add to the comfort of many and make life harder for as many more. But the addition to righteousness? Is that discoverable? I think not. The materialities were not invented in the interest of righteousness; that there is more righteousness in the world because of them than there was before, is hardly demonstrable, I think. In Europe and America there is a vast change (due to them) in ideals—do you admire it? All Europe and all America are feverishly scrambling for money. Money is the supreme ideal—all others take tenth place with the great bulk of the nations named. Money-lust has always existed, but not in the history of the world was it ever a craze, a madness, until your time and mine. This lust has rotted these nations; it has made them hard, sordid, ungentle, dishonest, oppressive.'' Who can fail to see that the whole tendency of Mark Twain's spirit ran precisely counter to the spirit of his age, that he belonged as naturally in the Opposition, as I have said, as all the great European writers of his time? Can we not also see, accordingly, that in stultifying him, in keeping him a child, his wife and his friends were the unconscious agents of the business régime, bent upon deflecting and restraining a force which, if it had matured, would have seriously interfered with the enterprise of industrial pioneering?

Far from having any stimulus to satire, therefore, Mark Twain was perpetually driven back by the innumerable obligations he had assumed into the rôle that gave him, as he said, comfort and peace. And to what did he not have to submit? ''We shall have bloody work in this country some of these days when the lazy *canaille* get organized. They are the spawn of Santerre and Fouquier-Tinville,'' we find Thomas Bailey Aldrich writing to Professor Woodberry in 1894. There was

the attitude of Mark Twain's intimates toward social and economic questions: the literary confraternity of the generation was almost a solid block behind the financial confraternity. In the moral and religious departments the path of the candidate for gentility was no less strait and narrow. "It took a brave man before the Civil War," says Mr. Paine, "to confess he had read 'The Age of Reason' ": Mark Twain observed once that he had read it as a cub pilot "with fear and hesitation." A man whose life had been staked on the pursuit of prestige, in short, could take no chances in those days! The most fearful warnings followed Mark Twain to the end. In 1880 or thereabouts he saw his brother Orion, in the Middle West, excommunicated, after a series of infidel lectures, and "condemned to eternal flames" by his own Church, the Presbyterian Church. "Huckleberry Finn" and "Tom Sawyer" were constantly being suppressed as immoral by the public libraries, and not in rural districts merely but in great centers: in Denver and Omaha in 1903, in godly Brooklyn as late as 1906. If the morals of those boys were considered heretical, what would have been thought of Mark Twain's other opinions? Even the title he suggested for his first important book—"The New Pilgrim's Progress"—was regarded in Hartford as a sacrilege. The trustees of the American Publishing Company flatly refused to have anything to do with it, and it was only when the money-charmer Bliss threatened to resign if he was not allowed to publish the book that these pious gentlemen, who abhorred heresy, but loved money more than they abhorred heresy, gave in. It was these same gentlemen who later became Mark Twain's neighbors and daily associates: it was with them he shared that happy Hartford society upon whose "community of interests" and "unity of ideals" the loyal Mr. Paine is obliged to dwell in his biography. Was Mark Twain to be expected to attack them?

His spirit was indeed quiescent during the middle years of his life: it is only in his early work, and only in his minor work, his "Sketches," that we find, smuggled in as it were among so many other notes, the frank note of the satirist. One recalls the promise he had made, as a sort of oblique acknowledgment of his father-in-law's loan, to the readers of his Buffalo paper: "I only want to assure parties having a friendly interest in the prosperity of the journal that I am not going to hurt the paper deliberately and intentionally at any time. I am not going to introduce any startling reforms, nor in any way attempt to make trouble." He, that "rough Western miner" on probation, knew that he could not be too circumspect. And yet among those early sketches a risky note now and then intrudes itself: "A Mysterious Visit," for example, that very telling animadversion upon a society in which "thousands of the richest and proudest, the most respected, honored and courted men" lie about their income to the tax-collector "every year." Is it not the case, however, that as time went on he got into the habit of somehow not noticing these little spots on the American sun?

In "The Gilded Age," it is true, his first and only novel, he seems frank enough. One remembers the preface of that book: "It will be seen that it deals with an entirely ideal state of society; and the chief embarrassment of the writers in this realm of the imagination has been the want of illustration. In a state where there is no fever of speculation, no inflamed desire for sudden wealth, where the poor are all simple-minded and contented, and the rich are all honest and generous, where society is in a condition of primitive purity, and politics is the occupation of only the capable and the patriotic, there are necessarily no materials for such a history as we have constructed out of an ideal commonwealth." That is fairly explicit and fairly animated, even if it is only a paragraph from a preface; and in fact the

whole background of the story, from the capital city, that "grand old benevolent national asylum for the Helpless," down, with its devasting irony about every American institution save family life—Congress, the law, trial by jury, journalism, business, education and the Church, East and West alike, almost prepares us for Mark Twain's final verdict regarding the "Blessings-of-Civilization Trust." And yet the total effect of the book is idyllic; the mirage of the America Myth lies over it like a rosy veil. Mark Twain might permit himself a certain number of acid glances at the actual face of reality; but he had to redeem himself, he wished to redeem himself for doing so—for the story was written to meet the challenge of certain ladies in Hartford—by making the main thread the happy domestic tale of a well brought up young man who finds in this very stubbly field the amplest and the softest straw for the snug family nest he builds in the end. Would he, for that matter, have presumed to say his say at all if he had not had the moral support of the collaboration of Charles Dudley Warner? "Clemens," we are told, "had the beginning of a story in his mind, but had been unwilling to undertake an extended work of fiction alone. He welcomed only too eagerly, therefore, the proposition of joint authorship." Mark Twain, the darling of the masses, brought Warner a return in money such as he probably never experienced again in his life; Warner, the respected Connecticut man of letters, gave Mark Twain the sanction of his name. An admirable combination! A model indeed, one might have thought it, for all New Englanders in their dealings with the West.

Am I exaggerating the significance of what might be taken for an accident? In any case, it was not until that latter period when he was too old and too secure in his seat to fear public opinion quite in this earlier way that he had his revenge in "The Man That Cor-

rupted Hadleyburg''—not till then, and then only in a measure did he ever again, openly and on a large scale, attack the spiritual integrity of industrial America. Occasionally, in some little sketch like ''The Great Revolution in Pitcairn,'' where the Presbyterian Yankee is described as ''a doubtful acquisition,'' he ventures a pinprick in the dark; and we know that he sent his ''1601'' anonymously to a magazine editor who had once remarked, ''O that we had a Rabelais!'': ''I judged,'' said Mark Twain, ''that I could furnish him one.'' But he had had his fingers burnt too often: he had no intention of persisting. It is notable, therefore, that having begun with contemporary society in ''The Gilded Age,'' he travels backward into the past for his subsequent pseudo-satirical themes: he feels free to express his social indignation only in terms of the seventh century England of the ''Connecticut Yankee,'' the fifteenth century England of ''The Prince and the Pauper,'' the fourteenth century France of ''Joan of Arc,'' the sixteenth century Austria of ''The Mysterious Stranger.'' Never again America, one observes, and never again the present, for the first of these books alone contains anything like a contemporary social implication and that, the implication of the ''Connecticut Yankee,'' is a flattering one. But I am exaggerating. Mark Twain does attack the present in the persons of the Czar and King Leopold, whom all good Americans abhorred. As for his attacks on corruption in domestic politics, on the missionaries in China, was he not, when he at last ''spoke out,'' supported by the leading citizens who are always ready to back the right sort of prophet? Turn to Mr. Paine's biography: you will find Mr. Carnegie, whom he called Saint Andrew, begging Saint Mark for permission to print and distribute in proper form that ''sacred message'' about the missionaries. Mark Twain knew how to estimate the sanctity of his own moral courage. ''Do right,''

he notes, in his private memoranda—"do right and you will be conspicuous."

Let us take one more instance, the supreme instance, of Mark Twain's intention and failure in his predestined rôle, the "Connecticut Yankee" itself. This was his largest canvas, his greatest creative effort, the most ambitious and in certain respects the most powerful of his works. Nothing could be more illuminating than a glance at his motives in writing it.

What, in the first place, was his ostensible motive? "The book," he says, in a letter to his English publisher, "was not written for America; it was written for England. So many Englishmen have done their sincerest best to teach us something for our betterment that it seems to me high time that some of us should substantially recognize the good intent by trying to pry up the English nation to a little higher level of manhood in turn."

No doubt, if Mark Twain had read this over in cold blood he would have blushed for his own momentary priggishness; it was not characteristic of him to talk about "higher levels of manhood." But he was in a pet. Matthew Arnold had been wandering among us, with many deprecating gestures of those superangelic hands of his. Matthew Arnold must always have been slightly irritating—he was irritating even at home, and how much more irritating when, having visited this country, he chose to dwell upon the rudimentary language of General Grant! Mark Twain saw red. An animadversion upon General Grant's grammar was an attack upon General Grant, an attack upon General Grant was an attack upon America, an attack upon America *and* upon General Grant was an attack upon Mark Twain, upon his heart as a friend of General Grant, upon his pocket-book as the publisher of General Grant, upon his *amour-propre* as the countryman of General Grant. The pioneer in him rose to the assault like a bull-buffalo

in defense of the herd. Mark Twain relapsed into a typical Huck Finn attitude: he doubled his fists and said, "You're another!"—just as he did a few years later in his reply to Paul Bourget. Then, longing for "a pen warmed-up in hell," he set to work to put those redcoats, Matthew Arnold, King George III, General Cornwallis and all the rest of them, for by this time he was in the full furore of the myth of the American Revolution, in their place. He even began a frantic defense of American newspapers, which at other times he could not revile enough, and filled his note-books with red-hot absurdities like this: "Show me a lord and I will show you a man whom you couldn't tell from a journeyman shoemaker if he were stripped, and who, in all that is worth being, is the shoemaker's inferior." In short, he covered both shoulders with chips and defied any and every Englishman, the whole English race, indeed, to come and knock them off.

Now here, I say, is the crucial instance of Mark Twain's failure as a satirist. In the moment of crisis the individual in him loses itself in the herd; the intellect is submerged in a blind emotion that leads him, unconsciously, into a sort of *bouleversement* of all his actual personal intentions. Against his instinct, against his purpose he finds himself doing, not the thing he really desires to do, i. e., to pry up the American nation, if the phrase must be used, "to a little higher level of manhood," which is the true office of an American satirist, but to flatter the American nation and lull its conscience to sleep. In short, instead of doing the unpopular thing, which he really wanted to do, he does the most popular thing of all: he glorifies the Yankee mechanic, already, in his own country, surfeited with glory, and pours ridicule upon the two things that least needed ridicule for the good of the Yankee mechanic's soul, if only because in his eyes they were sufficiently ridiculous already—England and the Middle Ages.

Could we have a better illustration of the betrayal of Mark Twain's genius? If any country ever needed satire it is, and was, America. Did not Mark Twain feel this himself in those rare moments of his middle years when he saw things truly with his own eyes? Let us take from his letters a comment on American society that proves it: "There was absolutely nothing in the morning papers," he writes in 1873: "you can see for yourself what the telegraphic headings were: BY TELEGRAPH—A Father Killed by His Son, A Bloody Fight in Kentucky, An Eight-Year-Old Murderer, A Town in a State of General Riot, A Court House Fired and Three Negroes Therein Shot While Escaping, A Louisiana Massacre, Two to Three Hundred Men Roasted Alive, A Lively Skirmish in Indiana (and thirty other similar headings). The items under those headings all bear date yesterday, April 16 (refer to your own paper)—and I give you my word of honor that that string of commonplace stuff was everything there was in the telegraphic columns that a body could call news. Well, said I to myself, this is getting pretty dull; this is getting pretty dry; there don't appear to be anything going on anywhere; has this progressive nation gone to sleep?" Knowing as we do the significance of Mark Twain's humor, we divine from the tone of these final comments that he already considers it none of his business, that as a writer he proposes to do nothing about it. But his eye is exceedingly wide open to those things! Would not any one say, therefore, that there is something rather singular in the spectacle of a human being living alertly in a land where such incidents were the staple of news and yet being possessed with an exclusive public passion to "pry the English nation up to a little higher level of manhood"? Isn't it strange to see the inhabitant of a country where negroes were being lynched at an average rate of one every four days filled with "a holy fire of

righteous wrath," as Mr. Paine says, because people were unjustly hanged in the seventh century? Mark Twain was sincerely angry, there is no doubt about that. But isn't it curious how automatically his anger was deflected from all its natural and immediate objects, from all those objects it might have altered, and turned like an air-craft gun upon the vacuity of space itself? "Perhaps," he says, in "What Is Man?" defining what he calls the master passion, the hunger for self-approval, "perhaps there is something that (man) loves more than he loves peace—*the approval of his neighbors and the public.* And perhaps there is something which he dreads more than he dreads pain—the *disapproval* of his neighbors and the public." Mark Twain ate his cake and had it too. He avoided the disapproval of his neighbors by not attacking America; he won their approval by attacking England. Then, as we can see from his famous letter to Andrew Lang, he tried to win the approval of England also by deprecating the opinion of cultivated readers and saying that he only wanted to be taken as a popular entertainer! "I have never tried, in even one single little instance, to help cultivate the cultivated classes. . . . And I never had any ambition in that direction, but always hunted for bigger game—the masses. I have seldom deliberately tried to instruct them, but I have done my best to entertain them, for they can get instruction elsewhere." That was what became of his noble purpose to "pry up the English nation" when the English nation manifested its objection to being pried up by virtually boycotting the book. The wiles of simple folk! They are the most successful of all.

The ironical part of this story—for it is worth pursuing—is that Mark Twain, the sober individual, had for England an exaggerated affection and admiration. His "first hour in England was an hour of delight,"

he records; "of rapture and ecstacy." "I would a good deal rather live here if I could get the rest of you over," he writes frankly in 1872; and Mr. Paine adds that, "taking the snug island as a whole, its people, its institutions"—its institutions, observe—"its fair rural aspects, he had found in it only delight." That was true to the end of his days; against a powerful instinct he defended even the Boer War because he so admired the genius of English administration. He had personal reasons for this, indeed, in the affection with which England always welcomed him. "On no occasion in his own country," we are told, of his first English lecture tour, "had he won such a complete triumph"; and how many of those triumphs there were! "As a rule," says Mr. Paine, "English readers of culture, critical readers, rose to an understanding of Mark Twain's literary value with greater promptness than did the same class of readers at home." "Indeed," says Mr. Howells, "it was in England that Mark Twain was first made to feel that he had come into his rightful heritage." Did his feeling for England spring from this? Who can say? But certainly it was intense and profound. Early in his life he planned, as we have seen, a book on England and gave it up because he was afraid its inevitable humor would "offend those who had taken him into their hearts and homes." Why, then, safely enthroned in America, did he, merely because he was annoyed with Matthew Arnold, so passionately desire to "pry" the English nation up? One key to this question we have already found, but it requires a deeper explanation; and the incident of this earlier book suggests it. Mark Twain's literary motives, and it was this, as I have said, that made him the typical pioneer, were purely personal. Emerson wrote his "English Traits" before the Civil War: in reporting his conversation with Walter Savage Landor, he made a remark that could not fail to hurt the feelings of

Robert Southey. What was his reason, what was his excuse? That Southey and Landor were public figures and that their values were values of public importance. Emerson, in short, instinctively regarded his function, his loyalties and his responsibilities as those of the man of letters, the servant of humanity. Mark Twain, no less typical of his own half-century, took with him to England the pioneer system of values in which everything was measured by the ideal of neighborliness. If he couldn't write without hurting people's feelings, he wouldn't write at all, for always, like the good Westerner, he thought of his audience as the group of people immediately surrounding him. In America, on the other hand, the situation was precisely reversed. What would please his Hartford neighbors, who had taken him into *their* hearts and homes?—that was the point now; and they, or the less cultivated majority of them, could not see England, through the eyes of a Connecticut Yankee, damned enough! Something, Mark Twain knew, he wanted to satirize—he was boiling with satirical emotion; and while the artist in him wished to satirize not England but America, the pioneer in him wished to satirize not America but England. And as usual the pioneer won.

Another motive corroborated this decision. "He had published," Mr. Paine tells us, "nothing since the 'Huck Finn' story, and his company was badly in need of a new book by an author of distinction. Also, it was highly desirable to earn money for himself." Elsewhere we read that the "Connecticut Yankee" "was a book badly needed by his publishing business with which to maintain its prestige and profit." Mark Twain, the author, we see, had to serve the prestige and profit of Mark Twain, the publisher; he was obliged, in short, to write something that would be popular with the American masses. How happy that publisher must have been for the provocation Matthew Arnold offered

him! Mark Twain, on the top-wave of his own capitalistic undertakings, was simply expressing the exuberance of his own character not as an artist but as an industrial pioneer in the person of that East Hartford Yankee who sets out to make King Arthur's England a "going concern." Who can mistake this animus?—"Look at the opportunities here for a man of knowledge, brains, pluck and enterprise to sail in and grow up with the country. The grandest field that ever was; and all my own, not a competitor." Prying up the English nation ends, as we see, with a decided general effect of patting the American nation on the back. The satirist has joined forces with the great popular flood of his generation; he has become that flood; he asks neither the why nor the whither of his going; he knows only that he wants to be in the swim. If, at that moment, the artist in Mark Twain had had only the tail of one eye awake, he would have laughed at the spectacle of himself drawing in dollars in proportion to the magnificence of his noble and patriotic defense of what everybody else, less nobly perhaps, but no less patriotically, was defending also.

"Frankness is a jewel," said Mark Twain; "only the young can afford it." Precisely at the moment when he was writing to Robert Ingersoll that remarkable letter which displayed a thirst for crude atheism comparable only to the thirst for crude alcohol of a man who has been too long deprived of his normal ration of simple beer, he was at work on "Tom Sawyer." "It is not a boys' book, at all," he says. "It will only be read by adults. It is only written for adults." Six months later we find him adding: "I finally concluded to cut the Sunday School speech down to the first two sentences, leaving no suggestion of satire, since the book is to be for boys and girls." Tell the truth or trump—but get the trick!

Almost incredible, in fact, to any one who is familiar

with the normal processes of the literary mind, was Mark Twain's fear of public opinion, that fear which was the complement of his prevailing desire for success and prestige. In later life it was his regular habit to write two letters, one of which he suppressed, when he was addressing any one who was not an intimate friend upon any subject about which his instinctive feelings clashed with the popular view. These unmailed letters in which, as Mr. Paine says, "he had let himself go merely to relieve his feelings and to restore his spiritual balance," accumulated in such a remarkable way that finally, as if he were about to publish them, Mark Twain for his own amusement wrote an introduction to the collection. "Will anybody contend," he says, "that a man can say to such masterful anger as that, Go, and be obeyed? . . . He is not to *mail* this letter; he understands that, and so he can turn on the whole volume of his wrath; there is no harm. He is only writing it to get the bile out. So to speak, he is a volcano; imagining himself erupting does no good; he must open up his crater and pour out in reality his intolerable charge of lava if he would get relief. . . . Sometimes the load is so hot and so great that one writes as many as three letters before he gets down to a mailable one; a very angry one, a less angry one, and an argumentative one with hot embers in it here and there."

Tragic Mark Twain! Irresponsible child that he is, he does not even ask himself whether he is doing right or wrong, so unquestioningly has he accepted the code of his wife and his friends. That superb passion, the priceless passion of the satirist, is simply being wasted, like the accumulated steam from an engine whose machinery has broken down and cannot employ it.

Turn to one of these occasions when the charge of lava boiled up in Mark Twain; compare the two unsent messages he wrote and the message he finally sent to Colonel George Harvey when the latter invited him to

dine with the Russian emissaries to the Portsmouth Conference in 1905. To understand them we must recall Mark Twain's opinion that the premature end of the Russo-Japanese War was "entitled to rank as the most conspicuous disaster in political history." Feeling, as he did, that if the war had lasted a month longer the Russian autocracy would have fallen, he was bitterly opposed to the conference that had been arranged by Roosevelt. Here are the two telegrams he did not send:

To Colonel Harvey.—I am still a cripple, otherwise I should be more than glad of this opportunity to meet those illustrious magicians who with the pen have annulled, obliterated and abolished every high achievement of the Japanese sword and turned the tragedy of a tremendous war into a gay and blithesome comedy. If I may, let me in all respect and honor salute them as my fellow-humorists, I taking third place, as becomes one who was not born to modesty, but by diligence and hard work is acquiring it. Mark.

Dear Colonel—No, this is a love-feast; when you call a lodge of sorrow send for me. Mark.

And this is the telegram he sent, which pleased Count Witte so much that he announced he was going to show it to the Czar:

To Colonel Harvey.—I am still a cripple, otherwise I should be more than glad of this opportunity to meet the illustrious magicians who came here equipped with nothing but a pen, and with it have divided the honors of the war with the sword. It is fair to presume that in thirty centuries history will not get done admiring these men who attempted what the world regarded as impossible and achieved it. Mark Twain.

Another example. In 1905 he wrote a "War Prayer," a bitterly powerful fragment of concentrated satire. Hear what Mr. Paine says about it: "To Dan Beard, who dropped in to see him, Clemens read the 'War Prayer,' stating that he had read it to his daughter Jean, and others, who had told him he must not print it, for it would be regarded as sacrilege. 'Still you are

going to publish it, are you not?' Clemens, pacing up and down the room in his dressing-gown and slippers, shook his head. 'No,' he said. 'I have told the whole truth in that, and only dead men can tell the truth in this world. It can be published after I am dead.' He did not care," adds Mr. Paine, "to invite the public verdict that he was a lunatic, or even a fanatic with a mission to destroy the illusions and traditions and conclusions of mankind." The conclusions of mankind! And Mark Twain was a contemporary of William James! There was nothing in this prayer that any European writer would have hesitated for a moment to print. Well, "I have a family to support," wrote this incorrigible playboy, who was always ready to blow thirty or forty thousand dollars up the chimney of some new mechanical invention. "I have a family to support, and I can't afford this kind of dissipation."

Finally, there was the famous episode of the Gorky dinner. Mark Twain was always solicitous for the Russian people; he wrote stinging rebukes to the Czar, rebukes in the Swinburnian manner but informed with a far more genuine passion; he dreamed of a great revolution in Russia; he was always ready to work for it. When, therefore, Maxim Gorky came to America to collect funds for this purpose, Mark Twain gladly offered his aid. Presently, however, it became known that Gorky had brought with him a woman without benefit of clergy: hotel after hotel, with all the pious wrath that is so admirably characteristic of Broadway, turned them into the street. Did Mark Twain hesitate even for a moment? Did anything stir in his conscience? Did it occur to him that great fame and position carry with them a certain obligation, that it is the business of leaders to prevent great public issues from being swamped in petty, personal ones? Apparently not. The authors' dinner, organized in Gorky's honor, was hastily, and with Mark Twain's consent, abandoned,

"An army of reporters," says Mr. Paine, "was chasing Clemens and Howells;" who appear on that page for all the world like a pair of terrified children. "The Russian revolution was entirely forgotten in this more lively, more intimate domestic interest." What was Mark Twain's own comment on the affair? "Laws," he wrote, in a private memorandum, "can be evaded and punishment escaped, but an openly transgressed custom brings sure punishment. The penalty may be unfair, unrighteous, illogical, and a cruelty; no matter, it will be inflicted just the same. . . . The efforts which have been made in Gorky's justification are entitled to all respect because of the magnanimity of the motive back of them, but I think that the ink was wasted. Custom is custom; it is built of brass, boiler-iron, granite; facts, reasonings, arguments have no more effect upon it than the idle winds have upon Gibraltar." What would Emerson or Thoreau have said, fifty years before, of such an argument, such an assertion of the futility of the individual reason in the face of "brass, boiler-iron, granite" and mob-emotion? It is perhaps the most pitifully abject confession ever written by a famous writer.

This is what became of the great American satirist, the Voltaire, the Swift, the Rabelais of the Gilded Age. If the real prophet is he who attacks the stultifying illusions of mankind, nothing, on the other hand, makes one so popular as to be the moral denouncer of what everybody else denounces. Of the real and difficult evils of society Mark Twain, to be sure, knew little. He attacked monarchy, yes; but monarchy was already an obsolescent evil, and in any case this man who took such delight in "walking with kings," as the advertisements say, in actual life, never attacked the one monarch who really was, as it appeared, secure in his seat, the Kaiser. He attacked monarchy because, as he said, it was an eternal denial of "the numerical mass of the

nation." He had become, in fact, the incarnation of that numerical mass, the majority, which, in the face of all his personal impulses, he could not consider as anything but invariably right. He could not be the spokesman of the immensities and the eternities, as Carlyle had been, for he knew them not; he could not be, like Anatole France, the spokesman of justice, for indeed he had no ideal. His only criterion was personal, and that was determined by his friends. "On the whole," as Mr. Paine says, "Clemens wrote his strictures more for relief than to print," and when he printed them it was because he had public opinion behind him. Revolt as he might, and he never ceased to revolt, he was the same man who, at the psychological moment, in "The Innocents Abroad," by disparaging Europe and its art and its glamorous past, by disparaging, in short, the history of the human spirit, had flattered the expanding impulse of industrial America. In the face of his own genius, in the face of his own essential desire, he had pampered for a whole generation that national self-complacency which Matthew Arnold quite accurately described as vulgar, and not only vulgar but retarding.

Glance at those last melancholy satirical fragments he wrote in his old age, those fragments which he never published, which he never even cared to finish, but a few paragraphs of which appear in Mr. Paine's biography. We note in them all the gestures of the great unfulfilled satirist he was meant to be; but they are empty gestures; only an impotent anger informs them; Mark Twain's preoccupations are those merely of a bitter and disillusioned child. He wishes to take vengeance upon the Jehovah of the Presbyterians to whom his wife has obliged him to pay homage; but the Jehovah of the Presbyterians, alas! no longer interests humanity. He is beset by all the theological obsessions of his childhood in Missouri; he has never even read

"Literature and Dogma"; he does not know that the morbid fears of that old Western village of his have ceased to trouble the moral conscience of the world; he imagines that he can still horrify us with his antiquated blasphemies. He has lived completely insulated from all the real currents of thought in his generation. "The human being," he says, in one of his notes, "needs to revise his ideas again about God. Most of the scientists have done it already, but most of them don't care to say so." He imagines, we see, that all the scientists have, like himself, lived in Hartford and Elmira and married ladies like Mrs. Clemens; and as, according to Mr. Paine, nobody ever dared to contradict him or tell him anything, he never, dazzled as he was by his own fame, discovered his mistake. "The religious folly you were born in you will die in," he wrote once: he meant that he had never himself faced anything out. Was he, or wasn't he, a Presbyterian? He really never knew. If he had matured, those theological preoccupations, constantly imaged in his jokes and anecdotes about heaven, hell and St. Peter, would have simply dropped away from his mind: his inability to express them had fixed them there and his environment kept him constantly reacting against them to the end. Think of those chapters in his Autobiography which he said were "going to make people's hair curl." Several of them, at least, we are told, dealt with infant damnation; but whose hair, in this twentieth century, is going to curl over infant damnation? How little he had observed the real changes in public opinion, this man who lived, instinctively, all his life long, in the atmosphere of the Western Sunday School! "To-morrow," he tells Mr. Paine, in 1906, "I mean to dictate a chapter which will get my heirs and assigns burnt alive if they venture to print it this side of A. D. 2006—which I judge they won't"; and what he dictates is an indictment of the orthodox God. He often spoke of "the edition of A. D.

2006," saying that it would "make a stir when it comes out," and even went so far, as we have seen, as to negotiate for the publication of his memoirs one hundred years after his death. He might have spared himself the trepidation. It is probable that by 1975 those memoirs will seem to the publishing world a very doubtful commercial risk.

Mark Twain's view of man, in short, was quite rudimentary. He considered life a mistake and the human animal the contemptible machine he had found him: that argues the profundity of his own temperament, the depth and magnitude of his own tragedy, but it argues little else. The absurdity of man consisted, in Mark Twain's eyes, in his ridiculous conception of heaven and his conceit in believing himself the Creator's pet. But surely those are not the significant absurdities. "His heaven is like himself: strange, interesting, astonishing, grotesque," he wrote in one of those pseudo-Swiftian "Letters from the Earth," which he dictated with such fervor to Mr. Paine. "I give you my word it has not a single feature in it that he *actually values.* It consists —utterly and entirely—of diversions which he cares next to nothing about here on the earth, yet he is quite sure he will like in heaven. . . . Most men do not sing, most men cannot sing, most men will not stay where others are singing if it be continued more than two hours. Note that. Only about two men in a hundred can play upon a musical instrument, and not four in a hundred have any wish to learn how. Set that down. Many men pray, not many of them like to do it. . . . All people, sane or insane, like to have variety in their lives. Monotony quickly wearies them. Now, then, you have the facts. You know what men don't enjoy. Well, they have invented a heaven, out of their own heads, all by themselves; guess what it is like?" How far does that satirical gesture carry us? It is too rustically simple in its animus, and its presuppositions about the tastes

of humanity are quite erroneous: to sing, to play and to pray, in some fashion or other, are universal, admirable and permanent impulses in man. What is the moral even of that marvelous Odyssey of "Huckleberry Finn"? That all civilization is inevitably a hateful error, something that stands in the way of life and thwarts it as the civilization of the Gilded Age had thwarted Mark Twain. But that is the illusion, or the disillusion, of a man who has never really known what civilization is, who, in "The Stolen White Elephant," like H. G. Wells in his early tales, delights in the spectacle of a general smash-up of a world which he cannot imagine as worth saving because he has only seen it as a fool's paradise. What is the philosophy of "The Man That Corrupted Hadleyburg"? "That every man is strong," as Mr. Paine says, "until his price is named." But that is not true, to the discriminating sense, at all. It is an army of fifty-two boys that the Connecticut Yankee collects in order to start the English republic: in childhood, and childhood alone, in short, had Mark Twain ever perceived the vaunted nobility of the race. The victim of an arrested development, the victim of a social order which had given him no general sense of the facts of life and no sense whatever of its possibilities, he poured vitriol promiscuously over the whole human scene. But that is not satire: that is pathology.

Mark Twain's imagination was gigantesque: his eye, in later life, was always looking through the small end or the large end of a telescope; he oscillated between the posture of Gulliver in Lilliput and the posture of Gulliver in Brobdingnag. That natural tendency toward a magnification or a minification of things human is one of the ear-marks of the satirist. In order to be effectual, however, it requires a measure, an ideal norm, which Mark Twain, with his rudimentary sense of proportion, never attained. It was not fear alone then, but an

artistic sense also that led him to suppress, and indeed to leave incomplete, most of the works in which this tendency manifested itself. One recalls his "3000 Years Among the Microbes," passages of which have been published by Mr. Paine. Glance at another example. "I have imagined," he said once, "a man three thousand miles high picking up a ball like the earth and looking at it and holding it in his hand. It would be about like a billiard-ball to him, and he would turn it over in his hand and rub it with his thumb, and where he rubbed over the mountain ranges he might say, 'There seems to be some slight roughness here, but I can't detect it with my eye; it seems perfectly smooth to look at.'" There we have the Swiftian, the Rabelaisian note, the Rabelaisian frame for the picture that fails to emerge. The fancy exists in his mind, but he is able to do nothing with it: all he can do is to express a simple contempt, to rule human life as it were out of court. Mark Twain never completed these fancies precisely, one can only suppose, because they invariably led into this *cul-de-sac*. If life is really futile, then writing is futile also. The true satirist, however futile he may make life seem, never really believes it futile: his interest in its futility is itself a desperate registration of some instinctive belief that it might be, that it could be, full of significance, that, in fact, it *is* full of significance: to him what makes things petty is an ever-present sense of their latent grandeur. That sense Mark Twain had never attained: in consequence, his satirical gestures remained mere passes in the air.

## CHAPTER XI

### MUSTERED OUT

"... a man who awoke too early in the darkness, while the others were all still asleep." DMITRI MEREJKOWSKI.

AND so we come to Mark Twain's last phase, to that hour when, outwardly liberated at last from the bonds and the taboos that have thwarted him and distorted him, he turns and rends the world in the bitterness of his defeat.

"Three score years and ten!" he said in that famous seventieth birthday speech. "It is the scriptural statute of limitations. After that you owe no active duties; for you the strenuous life is over. You are a time-expired man, to use Kipling's military phrase: you have served your term, well or less well, and you are mustered out."

What a conception of the literary career! You see how he looks back upon his life?

"A pilot in those days," he had written in "Life on the Mississippi," "was the only unfettered and entirely independent human being that lived in the earth. . . . Writers of all kinds are manacled servants of the public. We write frankly and fearlessly, but then we 'modify' before we print. In truth, every man and woman and child has a master, and worries and frets in servitude; but in the day I write of, the Mississippi pilot had none." No wonder he had loved that earlier career in which, for once and once only, he had enjoyed the indispensable condition of the creative life. As for the life of literature, it had been for him, and he assumed that

it was for all, a life of moral slavery. "We write frankly and fearlessly, but then we 'modify' before we print"! Shades of Tolstoy and Thomas Carlyle, of Nietzsche and Ibsen and Whitman, did you ever hear such words on the lips of a famous confrère? You, whose opinions were always unpopular, did you ever once, in the angelic naïveté of your souls, conceive the quaint idea of modifying a thought or a phrase because it annoyed some rich business man, some influential priest, some foolish woman? What were their flagellations, their gross and petty punishments to you, thrice-armored in the inviolate, immaterial aura of your own ingenuous truthfulness, the rapt contemplation of your noble dreams! Look with pity, then, out of your immortal calm, upon this poor frustrated child whom nature had destined to become your peer and who, a swan born among geese, never even found out what a swan was and had to live the goose's life himself! Yes, it is true that Mark Twain had never so much as imagined the normal existence of the artist, of the writer, who writes to please himself and by so doing brings eternal joy to the best of humanity—to whom old age, far from being a release from irksome duties, brings only, amid faltering forces, a fresh challenge to the pursuit of the visions and the hopes of youth. "You are a time-expired man, to use Kipling's military phrase; you have served your term"! It is in the language of the barracks, of the prison, of an alien discipline at last escaped that Mark Twain thinks of the writer's life. "And you are mustered out."

His first breathless thought was to "tell the truth" at last. Seventy years, he said again, is "the time of life when you arrive at a new and awful dignity; when you may throw aside the decent reserves which have oppressed you for a generation, and stand unafraid and unabashed upon your seven-terraced summit and look down and teach unrebuked." Huck Finn, escaping from an unusually long and disagreeable session

with Aunt Polly—that is the posture of Mark Twain, seventy years young, in this moment of release, of relief, of an abandon which, with time, has become filled with sober thoughts. To teach, unrebuked, unabashed, unafraid. Mr. Howells, referring to this period, speaks of "a constant growth in the direction of something like recognized authority in matters of public import": Mark Twain was, indeed, accepted as a sort of national sage. But how is it possible for any one who reads his speeches now, removed from that magnetic presence of his, to feel that he played this rôle in any distinguished way? Was he really the seer, the clairvoyant public counsellor? He had learned to look with a certain perspective upon what he came to call "this great big ignorant nation": the habitude of such power as he possessed, such experience of the world as he had had—and they were great in their way—showed him how absurd it was to spread the eagle any longer. There is something decidedly fresh and strong about those speeches still. He scouted the fatuous nonsense about "American ideals" that becomes more and more vocal the more closely the one American ideal of "all the people" approaches the vanishing-point. Good, sharp, honest advice he offered in abundance upon the primitive decencies of citizenship in this America, "the refuge of the oppressed from everywhere (who can pay fifty dollars admission)—any one except a Chinaman." Was he not courageous, indeed, this "general spokesman" of the epoch of Bishop Potter and Mrs. Potter Palmer? He who said, "Do right and you will be conspicuous," was the first to realize that his courage was of the sort that costs one little. That passion for the limelight, that inordinate desire for approval was a sufficient earnest that he could not, even if he had so desired, do anything essentially unpopular. It was no accident, therefore, that his mind was always drifting back to that famous watermelon story which tens of thousands of living

Americans have heard him tell: it appears three times in his published speeches. He told how as a boy he had stolen a watermelon and, having opened it and found it green, returned it to the farmer with a lecture on honesty; whereupon, he was rewarded with the gift of another watermelon that was ripe. It was the symbol of his own career, for his courage, and he frankly admitted it, had always been the sort of courage he described in his story "Luck."

"Tell the truth," in short, he could not; his life had given him so little truth to tell. His seventieth birthday had left him free to speak out; and yet, just as he "played safe" as a public sage, so also he continued to play safe as a writer. "Am I honest?" he wrote in that same seventy-first year to Twitchell. "I give you my word of honor (privately) I am not. For seven years I have suppressed a book which my conscience tells me I ought to publish. I hold it a duty to publish it. There are other difficult duties which I am equal to, but I am not equal to that one." It was his "Bible" —"What Is Man?"—which, as he had said some years before, "Mrs. Clemens loathes, and shudders over, and will not listen to the last half nor allow me to print any part of it." Did he publish it at last? Yes, anonymously; and from that final compromise we can see that his "mustering out" had come too late. He could not rouse himself, indeed, from the inertia with which old age and long habits of easy living had fortified the successful half of his double personality. Tolstoy, at eighty, set out on a tragic pilgrimage to redeem in his own eyes a life that had been compromised by wealth and comfort: but the poet in Tolstoy had never slumbered nor slept! It had kept the conflict conscious, it had registered its protest, not sporadically but every day, day in, day out, by act and thought; it had kept its right of way open. Mark Twain had lived too fully the life of the world; the average sensual man had

engulfed the poet. Like an old imprisoned revolutionist it faced the gates of a freedom too long deferred. What visions of revolt had thrilled it in earlier years! How it had shaken its bars! But now the sunlight was so sweet, the run of a little sap along those palsied limbs. On his seventieth birthday Mark Twain was dazzled by his liberty. He was going to tell the world the truth, the whole truth, and a little more than the truth! Within a week he found that he no longer had the strength.

Glance at Mr. Paine's record. In 1899, we find him writing as follows to Mr. Howells: "For several years I have been intending to stop writing for print as soon as I could afford it. At last I can afford it, and have put the pot-boiler pen away. What I have been wanting is a chance to write a book without reserves—a book which should take account of no one's feelings, and no one's prejudices, opinions, beliefs, hopes, illusions, delusions: a book which should say my say, right out of my heart, in the plainest language and without a limitation of any sort. I judged that that would be an unimaginable luxury, heaven on earth. It is under way, now, and it *is* a luxury! an intellectual drunk." The book was "The Mysterious Stranger." While he was under the spell of composing it, that sulphurous little fairy tale seemed to him the fruition of his desire. But he was inhibited from publishing it and this only poured oil upon the passion that possessed him. At once this craving reasserted itself with tenfold intensity. He tinkered incessantly at "What Is Man?" He wrote it and rewrote it, he read it to his visitors, he told his friends about it. Eventually he published this, but the fact that he felt he was obliged to do so anonymously fanned his insatiable desire still more. Something more personal he must write now! He fixed his mind on that with a consuming intensity. To express himself was no longer a mere artistic impulse; it had become a cate-

gorical imperative, a path out of what was for him a life of sin. "With all my practice," he writes, humorously, in one of his letters, "I realize that in a sudden emergency I am but a poor, clumsy liar." There is nothing humorous, however, in that refusal of his to continue Tom Sawyer's story into later life because he would only "lie like all the other one-horse men in literature and the reader would conceive a hearty contempt for him": there he expressed all the anguish of his own soul. To tell the truth now! What truth? Any and every kind of truth—anything that it would hurt him to tell and by so doing purge him! We recall how he had adored the frankness of Robert Ingersoll, how he had kept urging his brother Orion to write an autobiography that would spare nobody's feelings and would let all the cats out of the bag: "Simply tell your story to yourself, laying all hideousness utterly bare, reserving nothing," he had told him. Let Orion do it! we can almost hear him whispering to himself; and Orion had done it. "It wrung my heart," wrote Mr. Howells of that astounding manuscript, "and I felt haggard after I had finished it. The writer's soul is laid bare; it is shocking." Mark Twain had found a vicarious satisfaction in that, he who at the same moment was himself attempting to write "an absolutely faithful autobiography," as Mr. Paine tells us, "a document in which his deeds and misdeeds, even his moods and inmost thoughts, should be truly set down." To write such a book now had become the ruling desire of his life. He had developed what Mr. Paine calls "a passion for biography, and especially for autobiography, diaries, letters, and such intimate human history"—for confessions, in a word. He longed now not to reform the world but to redeem himself. "Writing for print!" —he speaks of that as of something unthinkable. A man who writes for print, he seems to say, this man who spoke of free speech as the "Privilege of the Grave,"

becomes a liar in the mere act. He is afraid of the public, but he is more afraid now of himself, whom he cannot trust. He wishes to write "not to be read," and plans a series of letters to his friends that are not going to be mailed. "You can talk with a quite unallowable frankness and freedom," he tells himself, in a little note which Mr. Paine has published, "because you are not going to send the letter. When you are on fire with theology you'll not write it to Rogers, who wouldn't be an inspiration; you'll write it to Twitchell, because it will make him writhe and squirm and break the furniture. When you are on fire with a good thing that's indecent you won't waste it on Twitchell; you'll save it for Howells, who will love it. As he will never see it you can make it really indecenter than he could stand; and so no harm is done, yet a vast advantage is gained." Was ever a more terrible flood piled up against the sluice-gates of a human soul?

At last the gates open. Safely seated behind a proviso that it is not to be published until he has been dead a century, Mark Twain begins his autobiography. In the first flush he imagines that he is doing what he has longed to do. "Work?" he said to a young reporter—the passage is to be found in the collection of his speeches. "I retired from work on my seventieth birthday. Since then I have been putting in merely twenty-six hours a day dictating my autobiography. . . . But it is not to be published in full until I am thoroughly dead: I have made it as caustic, fiendish and devilish as possible. It will fill many volumes, and I shall continue writing it until the time comes for me to join the angels. It is going to be a terrible autobiography. It will make the hair of some folks curl. But it cannot be published until I am dead, and the persons mentioned in it and their children and grandchildren are dead. It is something awful."

You see what he has in mind. For twenty years his

daily reading has been Pepys and Saint-Simon and Casanova. He is going to have a spree, a debauch of absolutely reckless confession. He is going to tell things about himself, he is going to use all the bold, bad words that used to shock his wife. His wife—perhaps he is even going to be realistic about her. Why not? Has he not already in his letters said two or three "playful" things about her, not incompatible with his affection, but still decidedly wanting in filial respect? Saint Andrew Carnegie and Uncle Joe Cannon, his "affectionate old friend" of the copyright campaign, are fair game anyway, and so are some of those neighbors in Hartford, and so are Howells and Rogers and Twitchell. He is going to exact his pound of flesh for every one of that "long list of humiliations"! But he is going to exact it like an Olympian. What is the use of being old if you can't rise to a certain impersonality, a certain universality, if you can't assume at last the prerogatives of the human soul, lost, in its loneliness and its pathos, upon this little orb that whirls amid the "swimming shadows and enormous shapes" of time and space, if you can't expand and contract your eye like the ghost you are so soon to be, if you can't bring home for once the harvest of all your pains and all your wisdom? As for that "tearing, booming nineteenth, the mightiest of all the centuries"—what a humbug it was, so full of cruelties and meannesses and lying hypocrisies! . . . What fun he is going to have—what magnificently wicked fun!

You see Mark Twain's intention. He is going to write, for his own redemption, the great book that all the world is thirsting for, the book it will gladly, however impatiently, wait a hundred years to read. And what happens? "He found it," says Mr. Paine, "a pleasant, lazy occupation," which prepares us for the kind of throbbing truth we are going to get. Twenty-six instalments of that Autobiography were published

before he died in the *North American Review.* They were carefully selected, no doubt, not to offend: the brimstone was held in reserve. But as for the quality of that brimstone, can we not guess it in advance? "He confessed freely," says Mr. Paine, "that he lacked the courage, even the actual ability, to pen the words that would lay his soul bare." One paragraph, in fact, that found its way into print among the diffuse and superficial impressions of the *North American Review* gives us, we may assume, the measure of his general candor: "I have been dictating this autobiography of mine daily for three months; I have thought of fifteen hundred or two thousand incidents in my life which I am ashamed of, but I have not gotten one of them to consent to go on paper yet. I think that that stock will still be complete and unimpaired when I finish these memoirs, if I ever finish them. I believe that if I should put in all or any of these incidents I should be sure to strike them out when I came to revise this book."

Bernard Shaw once described America as a nation of villagers. Well, Mark Twain had become the Village Atheist, the captain of his type, the Judge Driscoll of a whole continent. "Judge Driscoll," we remember, "could be a free-thinker and still hold his place in society, because he was the person of most consequence in the community, and therefore could venture to go his own way and follow out his own notions." Mark Twain had proved himself superlatively "smart"; he was licensed to say his say: what inhibited him now, therefore, even more than his habits of moral slavery, was a sense—how can we doubt it?—a half-unconscious sense that, concerning life itself, he had little of importance to communicate. His struggle of conscience over the publication of "What Is Man?" points, it is true, toward another conclusion. But certainly the writing of his Autobiography must have shown him that with all the will in the world, and with the freedom of abso-

lute privacy, he was incapable of the grand utterance of the prophets and the confessors. There was nothing to prevent him from publishing "3000 Years Among the Microbes," the design of which was apparently free from personalities, if he had been sufficiently interested to finish it. He thought of founding a School of Philosophy at Redding like that other school at Concord. But none of these impulses lasted. His prodigious "market value" confirmed him at moments, no doubt, in thinking himself a Nestor; but something within this tragic old man must have told him that he was not really the sage, the seer, and that mankind could well exist without the discoveries and the judgments of that gregarious pilgrimage of his. "It is noble to be good," he said, during these later years, "but it is nobler to show others how to be good, and less trouble," which conveys, in its cynicism, a profound sense of his own emptiness. He tempted the fates when he published "What Is Man?" anonymously. If that book had had a success of scandal, his conscience might have pricked him on to publish more: immature as his judgment was, he had no precise knowledge of the value of his ideas; but at least he knew that great ideas usually shock the public and that if his ideas were great they would probably have that gratifying effect. Fortunately or unfortunately, the book was received, says Mr. Paine, "as a clever, and even brilliant, *exposé* of philosophies which were no longer startlingly new." After that just, that very generous public verdict—for the book is, in fact, quite worthless except for the light it throws on Mark Twain—he must have felt that he had no further call to adopt the unpopular rôle of a Mephistopheles.

With all the more passion, however, his balked fury, the animus of the repressed satirist in him, turned against the harsher aspects of that civilization which had tied his tongue. Automatically, as we have seen from the incidents of the Gorky dinner and the Ports-

mouth Conference and the "War Prayer," restraining those impulses that were not supported by the sentiment of a safe majority, he threw himself, with his warm heart and his quick pulse, into the defense of all that are desolate and oppressed. "The human race was behaving very badly," says Mr. Paine, of the hour of his triumphant return to America in 1900: "unspeakable corruption was rampant in the city; the Boers were being oppressed in South Africa; the natives were being murdered in the Philippines; Leopold of Belgium was massacring and mutilating the blacks in the Congo; and the allied powers, in the cause of Christ, were slaughtering the Chinese." The human race had always been behaving badly, but Mark Twain was in a frame of mind to perceive it now. Was he the founder of the great school of muck-rakers? He, at any rate, the most sensitive, the most humane of men, rode forth to the encounter now, the champion of all who, like himself, had been in bondage. It is impossible to ignore this personal aspect of his passionate sympathy with suffering and weakness in any form, whether in man or beast. In these later years it was the spectacle of strength triumphing over weakness that alone aroused his passion or even, save in his autobiographic and philosophic attempts, induced him to write. One remembers those pages in "Following the Equator" about the exploitation of the Kanakas. Then there was his book about King Leopold and the Congo, and "The Czar's Soliloquy," and "A Horse's Tale," written for Mrs. Fiske's propaganda against bull-fighting in Spain. The Dreyfus case was an obsession with him. Finally, among many other writings of a similar tendency, there was his "Joan of Arc," in which he had summed up a lifetime's rage against the forces in society that array themselves against the aspiring spirit. Joan of Arc has always been a favorite theme with old men, old men who have dreamed of the heroic life perhaps, without

ever attaining it: the sharp realism of Anatole France's biography, which so infuriated Mark Twain, was, if he had known it, the prerogative of a veteran who, equally as the defender of Dreyfus, the comrade of Juarès and the volunteer of 1914, has proved that scepticism and courage are capable of a superb rapport. Mark Twain had not been able to rise to that level, and the sentimentality of his own study of Joan of Arc shows it. In his animus against the judges of Joan one perceives, however, a savage and despairing defense of the misprized poet, the betrayed hero, in himself.

The outstanding fact about this later effort of Mark Twain's is that his energy is concentrated almost exclusively in attacks of one kind or another. His mind, whether for good or ill, has become thoroughly destructive. He is consumed by a will to attack, a will to abolish, a will to destroy: "sometimes," he had written, a few years earlier, "my feelings are so hot that I have to take the pen and put them out on paper to keep them from setting me afire inside." He who had become definitely a pessimist, we are told, at forty-eight, in the hour of his great prosperity, was possessed now with a rage for destruction. Who can doubt that this was pathological? He was so promiscuous in his attacks! Had he not, as early as 1881, assailed even the postage rates; had he not been thrown into a fury by an order from the Post Office Department on the superscription of envelopes? There were whole days, one is told, when he locked himself up in his rooms and refused to see his secretary, when he was like a raging animal consumed with a blind and terrible passion of despair: we can hear his leonine roars even in the gentle pages of his biographer. Mr. Paine tells how he turned upon him one day and said fiercely: "Anybody that knows anything knows that there was not a single life that was ever lived that was worth living"; and again: "I have been thinking it out—if I live two years more I

will put an end to it all. I will kill myself." Was that a pose, as Mr. Howells says? Was it a mere humorous fancy, that "plan" for exterminating the human race by withdrawing all the oxygen from the earth for two minutes? Was it a mere impersonal sympathy for mankind, that perpetual search for means of easement and alleviation, that obsessed interest in Christian Science, in therapeutics? Was it not all, in that sound and healthy frame, the index of a soul that was mortally sick? Mark Twain's attack upon the failure of human life was merely a rationalization of the failure in himself.

And this failure was the failure of the artist in him.

Glance back thirty years; hear what he writes to Mr. Howells from Italy in 1878: "I wish I *could* give those sharp satires on European life which you mention, but of course a man can't write successful satire except he be in a calm, judicial good-humor; whereas I *hate* travel, and I *hate* hotels, and I *hate* the opera, and I *hate* the old masters. In truth, I don't ever seem to be in a good enough humor with anything to satirize it. No, I want to stand up before it and curse it and foam at the mouth, or take a club and pound it to rags and pulp. I have got in two or three chapters about Wagner's operas, and managed to do it without showing temper, but the strain of another such effort would burst me." That is what had become of the satirist, that is what had become of the artist, thirty years before! He, the unconscious sycophant of the crass materialism of the Gilded Age, who had, in "The Innocents Abroad," poured ignorant scorn upon so many of the sublime creations of the human spirit, he, the playboy, the comrade and emulator of magnates and wire-pullers, had begun even then to pay with an impotent fury for having transgressed his own instincts unawares. A born artist ridiculing art, a born artist hating art, a born artist destroying art—there we have the natural evolu-

tion of a man who, in the end, wishes to destroy himself and the world. How angrily suspicious he is, even thus early, of all æsthetic pretensions! What a fierce grudge he has against those who lay claim to a certain affection for the perverse mysteries of high art! They want to get into the dress circle, he says, by a lie; that's what they're after! The "Slave Ship," for all Ruskin's fine phrases, reminds him of a cat having a fit in a platter of tomatoes. Etcetera, etcetera. Here we have the familiar figure of the peasant who imagines a woman must be a prostitute because she wears a low-cut dress. But the peasant spits on the ground and walks on. Mark Twain cannot take it so lightly: that low-cut dress is a red rag to him; he foams and stamps wherever he sees it. Is it not evident that he is the prey of some appalling repression? It is not in the nature of man to desire a club so that he can pound works of art into rags and pulp unless they are the symbols of something his whole soul unconsciously desires to create and has been prevented from creating. Do we ask, then, why Mark Twain "detested" novels? It was because he had been able to produce only one himself, and that a failure.

We can understand now that intense will-*not*-to-believe in the creative life which Mark Twain revealed in his later writings. "Man originates nothing, not even a thought. . . . Shakespeare could not create. He was a machine, and machines do not create." Is it possible to mistake the animus in that? Mark Twain was an ardent Baconian: in that faith, he said, "I find comfort, solace, peace and never-failing joy." I will say nothing of the complete lack of intuition concerning the psychology of the artist revealed in his pamphlet, "Is Shakespeare Dead?" It is astonishing that any writer could have composed this, that any one but a retired business man or a lawyer infatuated with ratiocination could have so misapprehended the nature and

the processes of the poetic mind. But Mark Twain does not write like a credulous business man, indulging his hobby; he does not even write like a lawyer, feverishly checking off the proofs of that intoxicating evidence: he is defiant, he exults in the triumph of his own certitude, he stamps on Shakespeare, he insults him, he delights in pouring vulgar scorn upon that ingenuous bust in Stratford Church, with its "deep, deep, deep, subtle, subtle, subtle expression of a bladder." And why? Because the evidence permits him to believe that Shakespeare was an ignorant yokel. Bacon was the man, Bacon knew everything, Bacon was a lawyer—see what Macaulay says! Macaulay, heaven bless us all!—therefore, Bacon wrote the plays. Is this Mark Twain speaking, the author of the sublime illiteracies of "Huckleberry Finn," who had been himself most the artist when he was least the sophisticated citizen? It is, and he is speaking in character. He who asserted that man is a chameleon and is nothing but what his training makes him had long lost the intuition of the poet and believed perforce that without Bacon's training those plays could not have been written. But would he have stamped with such a savage joy upon that yokel Shakespeare if the fact, as he imagined, that man creates nothing had not had for him a tragic, however unconscious, significance? One can hardly doubt that when one considers that Mark Twain was never able to follow the Bacon ciphers, when one considers the emotional prepossession revealed in his own statement that he accepted those ciphers mainly on faith.

How simple it becomes now, the unraveling of that mournful philosophy of his, that drab mass of crude speculation of which he said so confidently that it was "like the sky—you can't break through anywhere." How much it meant to him, the thought that man is a mere machine, an irresponsible puppet, entitled to no demerit for what he has failed to do! "Dahomey," he

says, somewhere, "could not find an Edison out; in Dahomey an Edison could not find himself out. Broadly speaking, genius is not born with sight but blind; and it is not itself that opens its eyes, but the subtle influences of a myriad of stimulating exterior circumstances." What a comment, side by side with Mark Twain's life, upon Mr. Howells's statement that the world in which he "came into his intellectual consciousness" was "large and free and safe"—large, for the satirist, with Mrs. Clemens, free with Mr. Howells himself, and safe with H. H. Rogers! "If Shakespeare had been born and bred on a barren and unvisited rock in the ocean his mighty intellect would have had no outside material to work with, and could have invented none; and no outside influences, teachings, moldings, persuasions, inspirations of a valuable sort, and could have invented none; and so Shakespeare would have produced nothing. In Turkey he would have produced something—something up to the highest limit of Turkish influences, associations and training. In France he would have produced something better—something up to the highest limit of the French influences and training". . . . Mark Twain fails to mention what would have happened to Shakespeare if he had been born in America. He merely adds, but it is enough: "You and I are but sewing-machines. We must turn out what we can; we must do our endeavor and care nothing at all when the unthinking reproach us for not turning out Gobelins." There we have his half-conscious verdict on the destiny of the artist in a society as "large and free and safe" as that of the Gilded Age.

Yes, the tragic thing about an environment as coercive as ours is that we are obliged to endow it with the majesty of destiny itself in order to save our own faces! We dwell on the conditions that hamper us, destroy us, we embrace them with an *amor fati,* to escape from the contemplation of our own destruction. "Outside influ-

ences, outside circumstances, wind the man and regulate him. Left to himself, he wouldn't get regulated at all, and the sort of time he would keep would not be valuable." There is the complete philosophy of the moral slave who not only has no autonomy but wishes to have none, who, in fact, finds all his comfort in having none, and delights in denying the possibility of independence just because he does not possess it himself. The pragmatists have escaped this net in their own interestingly temperamental fashion, like flying-fish, by jumping over it. It remains, nevertheless, the characteristic philosophy of Americans who have a deep emotional stake in the human situation; and one might almost say that it honors Mark Twain. We only perceive, we are only mortified by the slavery of men, when nature has endowed us with the true hunger and thirst for freedom.

Who can doubt, indeed, that it was the very greatness of his potential force, the strength of his instinctive preferences, that confirmed in Mark Twain his inborn Calvinistic will-to-despise human nature, that fixed in him the obsession of the miscarriage of the human spirit? If the great artist is the freest man, if the true creative life is, in fact, the embodiment of "free will," then it is only he that is born for greatness who can feel, as Mark Twain felt, that the universe is leagued against him. The common man has no sense of having surrendered his will: he regards it as a mere pretension of the philosophers that man has a will to surrender. He eats, drinks and continues to be merry or morose regardless of his moral destiny: to possess no principle of growth, no spiritual backbone is, indeed, his greatest advantage in a world where success is the reward of accommodation. It is nothing to him that man is a "chameleon" who "by the law of his nature takes the color of his place of resort"; it is nothing to him whether or not, as Mark Twain said, the first command

the Deity issued to a human being on this planet was "Be weak, be water, be characterless, be cheaply persuadable," knowing that Adam would never be able to disobey. It is nothing to him, or rather it is much: for it is by this means that he wins his worldly prestige. How well, for that matter, it served the prevailing self in Mark Twain! "From the cradle to the grave, during all his waking hours, the human being is under training. . . . It is his human environment which influences his mind and his feelings, furnishes him his ideals, and sets him on his road and keeps him in it. If he leave that road he will find himself shunned by the people whom he most loves and esteems, and whose approval he most values. . . . The influences about him create his preferences, his aversions, his politics, his tastes, his morals, his religion. He creates none of these things for himself." Poor Mark Twain! That is the way of common flesh. But only the great spirit so fully apprehends the tragedy of it.

Nothing, consequently, could be more pathetic than the picture Mark Twain draws, in "What Is Man?" and in his later memoranda, of the human mind. It is really his own mind he is describing, and one cannot imagine anything more unlike the mind of the mature artist, which is all of a single flood, all poise, all natural control. "You cannot keep your mind from wandering, if it wants to; it is master, not you. . . . The mind carries on thought on its own hook. . . . We are automatic machines which act unconsciously. From morning till sleeping-time, all day long. All day long our machinery is doing things from habit and instinct, and without requiring any help or attention from our poor little 7-by-9 thinking apparatus". . . . Man "has habits, and his habits will act before his thinking apparatus can get a chance to exert its powers." Mark Twain cannot even conceive of the individual reacting, as the mature man, as the artist preëminently, does, upon his

instinctive life and controlling it for his own ends. He shows us the works of his mental machine "racing along from subject to subject—a drifting panorama of ever-changing, ever-dissolving views manufactured by my mind without any help from me—why, it would take me two hours to merely name the multitude of things my mind tallied off and photographed in fifteen minutes." The mind?—man "has no control over it; it does as it pleases. It will take up a subject in spite of him; it will stick to it in spite of him; it will throw it aside in spite of him. It is entirely independent of him." Does he call himself a machine? He might better have said a merry-go-round, without the rhythm of a merry-go-round. Mark Twain reveals himself in old age as a prey to all manner of tumbling, chaotic obsessions; his mind rings with rhymes he cannot banish, sticks and stumbles over chess-problems he has no desire to solve: "it wouldn't listen; it played right along. It wore me out and I got up haggard and wretched in the morning." A swarming mass of dissociated fragments of personality, an utterly disintegrated spirit, a spirit that has lost, that has never possessed, the principle of its own growth. Always, in these speculations, however, we find two major personalities at war with each other. One is the refractory self that wants to publish the book regardless of consequences; the other is the "insolent absolute Monarch inside of a man who is the man's master" and who forbids it. The eternal conflict of Huckleberry Finn and Aunt Polly playing itself out to the end in the theater of Mark Twain's soul!

The interpretation of dreams is a very perilous enterprise: contemporary psychology hardly permits us to venture into it with absolute assurance. And yet we feel that without doubt our unconscious selves express through this distorting medium their hidden desires and fears. "I generally enjoy my dreams," Mark Twain

once told Mr. Paine, "but not those three, and they are the ones I have oftenest." He wrote out these "three recurrent dreams" in a memorandum: one of them is long and, to me at least, without obvious significance, but one cannot fail to see in the other two a singular corroboration of the view of Mark Twain's life that has been unfolded in these pages.

"There is never a month passes," he wrote, "that I do not dream of being in reduced circumstances, and obliged to go back to the river to earn a living. It is never a pleasant dream, either. I love to think about those days; but there's always something sickening about the thought that I have been obliged to go back to them; and usually in my dream I am just about to start into a black shadow without being able to tell whether it is Selma Bluff, or Hat Island, or only a black wall of night.

"Another dream that I have of that kind is being compelled to go back to the lecture platform. I hate that dream worse than the other. In it I am always getting up before an audience with nothing to say, trying to be funny; trying to make the audience laugh, realizing that I am only making silly jokes. Then the audience realizes it, and pretty soon they commence to get up and leave. That dream always ends by my standing there in the semi-darkness talking to an empty house."

I leave my readers to expound these dreams according to the formulas that please them best. I wish to note only two or three points. Mark Twain is obsessed with the idea of going back to the river: "I love to think about those days." But there is something sickening in the thought of returning to them, too, and that is because of the "black shadow," the "black wall of night," into which he, the pilot, sees himself inevitably steering. That is a precise image of his life; the second dream is its natural complement. On the lecture plat-

form his prevailing self had "revelled" in its triumphs, and, he says, "I hate that dream worse than the other." Had he ever wished to be a humorist? He is always "trying to make the audience laugh"; the horror of it is that he has lost, in his nightmare, the approval for which he had made his great surrender.

Turn, again, to the last pages in Mr. Paine's biography, to the moment when he lay breathing out his life in the cabin of that little Bermuda packet:

"Two dreams beset him in his momentary slumber—one of a play in which the title-rôle of the general manager was always unfilled. He spoke of this now and then when it had passed, and it seemed to amuse him. The other was a discomfort: a college assembly was attempting to confer upon him some degree which he did not want. Once, half roused, he looked at me searchingly and asked: 'Isn't there something I can resign and be out of all this? They keep trying to confer that degree upon me and I don't want it.' Then, realizing, he said: 'I am like a bird in a cage: always expecting to get out, and always beaten back by the wires.'"

No, Mark Twain's seventieth birthday had not released him: it would have had to release him from himself! It cut away the cords that bound him; but the tree was not flexible any more, it was old and rigid, fixed for good and all; it could not redress the balance. In one pathetic excess alone the artist blossomed: that costume of white flannels, the temerity of which so shocked Mr. Howells in Washington. "I should like," said Mark Twain, "to dress in a loose and flowing costume made all of silks and velvets resplendent with stunning dyes. So would every man I have ever known; but none of us dares to venture it." There speaks the born artist, the starved artist who for forty years has had to pretend that he was a business man, the born artist who has always wanted to be "original" in his

dress and has had to submit to a feverish censorship even over his neckties—the artist who, longing to look like an orchid, has the courage at last and at least to emulate the modest lily!

And so we see Mark Twain, with his "dry and dusty" heart, "washing about on a forlorn sea of banquets and speech-making," the saddest, the most ironical figure in all the history of this Western continent. The king, the conquering hero, the darling of the masses, praised and adored by all, he is unable even to reach the cynic's paradise, that vitriolic sphere which has, after all, a serenity of its own. The playboy to the end, divided between rage and pity, cheerful in his self-contempt, an illusionist in the midst of his disillusion, he is the symbol of the creative life in a country where "by the goodness of God, we have those three unspeakably precious things: freedom of speech, freedom of conscience, and the prudence never to practise either of them." He is the typical American, people have said: let heaven draw its own conclusions. As for ourselves, we are permitted to think otherwise. He was the supreme victim of an epoch in American history, an epoch that has closed. Has the American writer of to-day the same excuse for missing his vocation? "He must be very dogmatic or unimaginative," says John Eglinton, with a prophetic note that has ceased to be prophetic, "who would affirm that man will never weary of the whole system of things which reigns at present. . . . We never know how near we are to the end of any phase of our experience, and often when its seeming stability begins to pall upon us, it is a sign that things are about to take a new turn." Read, writers of America, the driven, disenchanted, anxious faces of your sensitive countrymen; remember the splendid parts your confrères have played in the human drama of other times and other peoples, and ask yourselves whether the hour has not come to put away childish things and walk the stage as poets do.

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Brooks, V.W.

The ordeal of Mark Twain

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